

# Teamsters bureaucracy calls off Costco strike at last minute, sparking outrage from workers

Our correspondents  
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*Costco workers: Tell us what you think about the cancellation of the strike! All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

In the early hours of Saturday, February 1, the Teamsters bureaucracy announced a tentative agreement to block a strike by 18,000 Costco workers. This deal was negotiated behind closed doors and is still concealed from the membership.

Costco, with its 219,000 US employees and 617 stores nationwide, has only 56 locations where workers are unionized. Nonetheless, a strike would have raised the potential for united struggle among union and non-union workers, demonstrating the power of collective action.

Given the explosive political environment in the United States, it also raised the potential for a confrontation by the working class against the Trump administration, whose attacks on immigrants immediately endanger the status of many immigrant workers at Costco, along with implications that threaten the democratic rights of all.

Instead, Teamsters officials made no real preparations for a strike, as reported by rank-and-file members across various locals. From the beginning, it was evident that the union leadership's primary goal was to avoid any disruption to Costco's operations rather than to fight for workers' demands.

In this, the Teamsters are recycling their tactics at UPS in 2023, where they used a bogus "strike ready" campaign as a smokescreen to spring a deal on workers at the last minute. That contract, sold to workers as a victory produced by a "credible strike threat," has since been followed by tens of thousands of layoffs at UPS.

Above all, the bureaucracy was determined to block a strike which could have intersected with the rapidly expanding protests against the Trump administration. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien is a top ally of Trump, and many other union officials have backed his "America First" nationalism and declared their willingness to "work" with him.

In a statement prepared in advance of what would have been the largest US strike this year, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote:

Immigrants are not "criminals" responsible for taking "American" jobs, as Trump claims, but our fellow

workers and brothers and sisters. No doubt, thousands of immigrant workers are taking part in the Costco strike, and when nonunion Costco workers are included, tens of thousands work at this one company.

...Trump claims that "America First" will save American jobs. The reality is that the working class, both foreign and "native" born, are his primary target, as in every dictatorship in history. His government is of, by and for the oligarchy, backed by billionaires and even outright fascists like Elon Musk.

"The defense of the rights of workers requires a fight against the union bureaucrats," the statement continued. "As far as Trump's plan for dictatorship is concerned," the WSWs explained, "the bureaucracy's only concern is that it gets a 'seat at the table' in the new regime, no matter what happens to workers."

The statement concluded:

[The struggle of Costco workers] requires transferring power from the union apparatus to rank-and-file committees, made up of the most trusted workers and excluding officials. These committees must be based on a strategy of 1) the absolute, democratic authority of the rank and file, not career officials, and 2) the unity of workers of all races, nationalities and ethnicities. Those in the Teamsters hierarchy who promote fascism and "America First" racism must be called to account. There is no reason that workers should continue to finance these peoples' six-figure salaries with their dues money.

## Details hidden from workers

The most glaring aspect of the Costco agreement is the absolute secrecy surrounding its terms. Workers have not been

given any details, a clear indication that the deal falls far short of what is necessary to keep up with the soaring cost of living.

Given that inflation continues to erode wages nationwide, any agreement that does not include substantial increases in real pay and benefits is an outright betrayal. The silence from Teamsters leadership reveals its bad faith and only confirms that the deal is woefully inadequate. Otherwise, they would be shouting the details from the rooftops.

The WSWS spoke to Costco workers at various locations in Los Angeles, Long Beach and San Diego. Many were upset to learn the strike they voted for was called off at the eleventh hour around 2:27 in the morning via a post on X/Twitter. Workers said they still were in the dark about details.

At some locations, WSWS reporters learned that truck drivers called out of work Saturday to protest the cancellation of the strike.

Tony said, “We haven’t been told anything about the contract. I’m able to get a pension because I’ve worked [decades] for Costco. But a lot of these young people will never see that.”

“The other thing the union gave up the last time was Kin Care, where you can get days off to take care of a sick child or family member. That’s very hard on everyone. Many of the younger workers are starting to have families and kids get sick. They need to take time off. They’re finding out how difficult it is because that’s not available to them. We still have to vote on this contract. But in the end we have to find out what we have to do to fight the whole system.”

One young worker who helps gather the shopping carts at the Signal Hill store said the country “looks like an oligarchy right now. Trump has Elon next to him, and they have so much power. He has a billionaire on his side. It’s like a second president.”

A recently hired worker gathering the shopping carts said, “I’m not too familiar with all the reasons behind the strike. But the Teamsters endorsing, promoting Trump? I mean, I’m critical of both sides always, the Democrats and Republicans ... [but] Trump is a whole entity entirely, and I don’t support anything he has going on at all. It’s objectively immoral in all ways.”

Thomas has been working at Costco in San Diego for over 10 years. He told reporters “I think you’re right, they never intended to strike. They never told us what the plan was, didn’t warn the customers, did not send out information about what to expect.” Workers have been forced to give up concessions on sick days in previous contracts. “Essentially sick time went from 30 days to 12 days, now why the Teamsters accepted that is a good question. I’d say the contracts keep getting worse. What are the Teamsters doing other than collecting our money?”

Juan, a food service employee said, “We had no information and what bothered me was that there was never anything in writing. Everything was word of mouth from the steward and

nothing was clear. The union was asking for a \$10 dollar raise, \$5 in the first year. Then when they told us Costco was only offering \$1 an hour raise each year, that is not even meeting us in the middle and tells me they don’t really care about negotiating.

In Los Angeles, Alvin told WSWS reporters Costco was discussing increased surveillance on workers and that this was a major issue in the next contract. “What do you need to watch me for? I don’t steal, I don’t get it, that’s overboard and I don’t agree with that attack on my privacy.”

Alvin added that both his father and grandfather were auto workers, who retired with pensions. He said that the situation for what workers in his generation face is far worse. “All that is gone now. They’ve tried to replace those types of unions with, you know, these types of unions and situations.”

Michael, who has been working at Costco for over ten years, told reporters: “This is actually the first time I’m hearing of an agreement that was reached. Is that true?”

“I know that my rent is due to go up in May and I don’t know if I’m gonna be able to afford to stay where I currently live. I’m praying that the negotiations go well and that we do see a substantial wage increase to account for that increase in cost of living. But I’m not optimistic, I’m doubtful that whatever they do agree to is going to be enough to compensate for the cost of living increases.”

He added: “I know that a lot of people like to paint Trump as the political outsider ... But I don’t think that you can be a billionaire and claim to be a pro-worker. I think that he has made a career out of exploiting the working class, minorities and immigrants. A very carefully crafted public persona and campaign he ran has duped a lot of working class people into thinking that he will be better for them when I think that it’s pretty fair to say that that’s not the case and he’s already showing why.”

“[But] the Democrats’ attitudes towards the war in Gaza feels very similar to that of the Republicans, and that feels again like a continuation of the status quo...Pretty much, to me, I believe that the Democratic Party is centrist at best in economic issues and only really left leaning when it comes to identity politics. And that, I believe, is one of the largest contributors to why they lost. I think that the majority of people are a little bit tired of identity politics... To me the Democrats and the Republicans feel like two heads of the same beast, two sides of the same coin.”



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