

Boston: Hundreds protest Wayfair's profiting from sales to immigrant detention centers

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Hundreds of employees of Wayfair walked off their jobs at the Boston-based online furniture retailer to protest the company's decision to profit from sales to migrant detention centers. They were joined by hundreds of supporters, including many who had heard of the protest on social media, in a rally in Copley Square.

Members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who had promoted the protest on Twitter, were prominently represented, along with supporters of many pseudo-left groups. Campaigners for Democratic candidates, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, also joined the protest. They all promoted the line that Trump and his immigration policies had to be opposed at all costs, whatever politician might replace him—i.e., a Democrat.

Last week 557 Wayfair workers sent a letter to Wayfair management demanding the end of operations that furnish detention centers. Employees learned last week that a \$200,000 order of bedroom furniture was placed by private contractor BCFS for a detention facility in Carrizo Springs, Texas. They specifically demanded that Wayfair donate the \$86,000 in profits it reportedly made from this recent sale to RAICES, an immigrant justice nonprofit.

"We believe that the current actions of the United States and their contractors at the Southern border do not represent an ethical business partnership Wayfair should choose to be a part of," the letter stated according to the *Boston Globe*. "At Wayfair, we believe that 'everyone should live in a home that they love.' Let's stay true to that message by taking a stand against the reprehensible practice of separating families, which denies them any home at all."

The company responded that it would not cease doing business with detention centers, and that "As a retailer,

it is standard practice to fulfill orders for all customers and we believe it is our business to sell to any customer who is acting within the laws of countries within which we operate." In other words, they defend their right to make a profit.

On Wednesday, Wayfair told NBC News that it is donating, "\$100,000 to support the American Red Cross in their effort to help those in dire need of basic necessities at the border" and that it respects "the passion of all our employees." It did not indicate that it would stop profiting from sales to detention centers.

Madeleine Howard, a Wayfair employee and former co-chair of the local DSA, addressed the rally. "I've been working at Wayfair now for about six and a half or seven years," she said. "I started straight out of college, and this is my first job. This is the first time I had to make sure I was proud of my company. That I was happy to work for them. To make sure we're all adherents of Wayfair values. Like, 'everyone deserves a home that they love.'"

Protesters held banners denouncing the Trump administration's immigration policies and Wayfair's complicity, including: "Break ICE," "Don't Profit off of Pain," "Complicity Will NOT be Tolerated" and "Abolish ICE—No Kids in Cages."

The crowd was vocal in their anger, with several who spoke to the WSWWS denouncing the policies of the Democratic Party, in contrast to what was said by the DSA. Cecil, a Boston Public School teacher, said, "I'm here because I don't think people should be put in prison just because they're trying to cross the border. And I certainly don't think that companies should be profiting off of that.

"We have a humanitarian crisis going on, people are dying, and the fact that this is being tolerated and continues to go on is inexcusable.

“Effectively what Democrats are trying to do is make it seem as if they care. Because right now it’s very public and visible that horrors are going on. But it seems that if it’s out of people’s eyes that they will be going back to allowing it to happen.”

Matt, who teaches at a private school in Boston, said, “As an educator I work with children every day and I think what the Trump administration is doing is absolutely horrendous. I think ICE should be defunded and abolished. And I applaud the workers for coming together, because when we come together as laborers and refuse to condone this activity and refuse to allow our labor power to promote these policies, that’s how we’re going to make a difference.”

However, Wayfair employees were not speaking to the press, telling reporters to contact PR.wayfair.com, the company’s public relations team.

The walkout earned the support of DSA member and US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who wrote on Twitter prior to the protest, “Wayfair workers couldn’t stomach they were making beds to cage children. They asked the company to stop. CEO said no.”

“Tomorrow, they’re walking out,” she continued. “This is what solidarity looks like—a reminder that everyday people have real power, as long as we’re brave enough to use it.”

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who toured a Florida detention center prior to Wednesday’s Democratic presidential debate, tweeted: “I stand with the hundreds of @Wayfair employees who are planning to stage a walkout at their Boston headquarters tomorrow. The safety and well-being of immigrant children is always worth fighting for.”

Ocasio-Cortez and her fellow “progressives” in the US House—while touting their support for suffering immigrant children—voted Tuesday to bring to the floor for a vote a \$4.5 billion measure that would boost the Trump administration’s threatened arrest of “millions” of immigrants and fund the American Gestapo in its terror operations, including against young children separated from their parents.

The perspective offered at Wednesday’s Wayfair walkout and protest ceded the fight against Trump’s immigration policies to Democrats like Warren and Ocasio-Cortez. Those serious about the fight against the government’s brutal war on immigrants cannot

leave it in such pathetic hands. The urgent threat to the safety and lives of immigrants requires the mobilization of the working class.



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