

Detroit area, Keurig Dr Pepper/Seven-Up distribution workers strike over pay inequity

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Workers at the Keurig/Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Bottling Co (KDS) distribution facility in Redford, Michigan west of Detroit have been on strike since March 11. The facility packages and distributes Keurig and Dr Pepper beverages around the state of Michigan. Almost three months after the contract expiration, Teamsters Local 337 was finally forced to call a strike under pressure from workers who were angry over the dragging out of negotiations.

The strike has been called by the Teamsters as an unfair labor practice strike, rather than a contract dispute, raising the possibility that the strike could be unilaterally ended before a ratified contract agreement is in place.

Management has continued operations throughout the strike using scab labor. According to a Facebook post, company security guards assaulted a Teamster business agent Wednesday and spewed racial slurs. Meanwhile, the corporate media has maintained a complete news blackout of the strike.

The current contract negotiations affect about 90 workers within the warehouse as well as beverage distribution drivers. According to Local 337, there were two separate pay tiers implemented for workers hired before and after 2005. Warehouse workers hired before 2005 make \$2.30 more than workers hired after. In addition to the warehouse workers' wages, the company is attempting to create positions that do not require commercial driver's license certification (CDL) for the distribution drivers. Since the beginning of the pandemic the plant has had workers on 12 plus hour shifts running at roughly 130 percent capacity.

On social media, KDS workers and workers from around the metro Detroit area have posted messages in support of the strikers. A relative of a distribution driver in the plant posted in groups regarding the

attempt to force out seniority workers for lower wage unlicensed workers, "They are trying to force out seniority workers and replace them with inexperienced workers without certifications and CDL... They all continued working through covid because they deliver water and vitamin water so were considered essential even though for the first several weeks after all the mandates, they had no protection."

Local 337 also represents Sysco delivery drivers in Monroe, Michigan who struck one year ago for a first contract. Like KDP strike, the Teamsters called the Sysco strike over unfair labor practices.

The Local 337 website lists no demands in relation to the KDS strike, only stating that the local has been 'diligently' working on negotiations.

Local 337 Business Agent Tony Reisdorf, in a video interview recorded by UAW local officials, pointed to three issues in the contract negotiations; pay disparity between warehouse workers, non CDL A driver positions at half pay and Martin Luther King Day as a paid holiday. He noted that KDS had been operating at over full capacity for the last year, adding, "we're very thankful cause we had a lot of people struggling, we're thankful we had that. But they busted their butts all on their backs to make this company record profits."

United Auto Workers Region 1A issued a statement in support of the strike, noting the assault on pickets by company security thugs. However, the UAW proposed no official action in support of the strike, other than to call for a boycott of Seven-Up/Dr. Pepper products.



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