

Detroit strikers denounce two tiers and forced 12-hour days at Keurig/Dr Pepper/Seven-Up

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Workers at the Keurig/Dr. Pepper/Seven-Up Bottling Co (KDS) distribution facility in Redford, Michigan, have been striking since March 11th. The strike, called by the Teamsters three months after the workers' previous contract expired, is over unfair labor practices.

On day 10 of the strike last Saturday a group of pickets spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* at the facility on Beech Daly Road a mile west of the Detroit city line. "Every day we step in that door we have to work 12 hours," said a warehouseman on picket duty. "When you come to work here, you have to give up your family life."

The picket went on to detail the company's relentless attempt to enforce overtime. "If you get caught up and don't have any work to do," he said, "they won't let you go home. They will find something for you to do to push you to do 12 hours."

Full pay for warehouse work is over \$20 an hour, but the pickets reported that anybody hired in after 2005 gets around \$16 in a sweetheart two-tier system that the union forced through. In a union-sponsored video, Teamsters Local 337 recording secretary and business agent Tony Reisdorf claims the differential is only \$2.30.

The strikers are bitterly opposed to the mandatory 12-hour shifts, but the union has not advanced the demand to put a stop to it or to bring all employees up to full pay. The Teamsters have advanced no slate of demands nor reached out to workers at the multiple Amazon warehouses in the region or the auto plants where workers are engaged in a bitter battle against the destruction of the eight-hour day.

The company is now pressing the attack with demands to phase out the higher pay scales altogether.

The strikers expressed a strong sense of solidarity with their brothers and sisters throughout basic

industry. "A buddy of mine works at Amazon," a fellow picket chimed in, "they have to run all day from one end of the warehouse to the other. And the place is huge. They only have so much time complete each operation, so they are constantly rushing, and there are lots of injuries."

A truck driver explained the threat contained in the company's demand to hire drivers without CDL licensees. "We don't want that," he said. "Right now we might leave with 600 cases on a semi to deliver. That's how we get overtime. If we allow these B and C class drivers, the company will break up our loads and let them take out box trucks and vans with smaller loads for less money. Then they [the company] can cut pay and cut hours."

The demands by management at the facility reflect the trend across industries towards "Amazonization" of labor, or the adoption of the low pay and brutal workplace which typify conditions at the online retail giant. The conditions enforced at nonunion Amazon, however, are being implemented at other companies with the collaboration of the unions. In the auto industry, this reached a new phase after the new contract was rammed through in 2019, allowing virtually unlimited use of temps.

As for the Teamsters, they rammed through a contract at UPS in 2018, in spite of a majority "no" vote, which contained sweeping concessions, include the creation of a new classification of lower-paid delivery driver.

The same day our reporters visited the picket line, Michigan congresspersons Rashida Tlaib, Haley Stevens and Debbie Dingell staged a media event at the site. The Democratic politicians and the Teamsters sought to portray the strike through a racial lens. In reporting on their visit, the *Detroit Free Press* stated, "Race was also a topic of discussion surrounding the

two-tier system, as the Teamsters said most of the higher-paid tier workers were white, while second-tier workers were Black.” They also sought to promote the PRO Act, the Democratic-sponsored bill aimed at expanding the footprint of the unions.

Dingell, the senior member and leader of the delegation, is a former GM executive, who also worked as a consultant for the American Automotive Policy Council, an industry trade and lobbying group.

Her late husband and predecessor in the Michigan 12th District played a key role in the Obama administration’s restructuring of the auto industry, carried out with the support of the UAW, which slashed wages in half for new hires.

Extremely concerned with the rapid growth of opposition in the working class, the Democratic Party, which is playing the leading role in reopening schools and workplaces, is throwing its weight behind the unions, whom they see as a crucial means of channeling this opposition into harmless channels.

This was expressed in the extraordinary intervention by President Biden in support of the unionization campaign at an Amazon facility in Bessemer, Alabama, as well as the intervention by Democratic figures such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the Hunts Point Market strike in the Bronx earlier this year. While promoting illusions in the Teamsters union, the Democrats, under New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, did not hesitate to send in riot cops against picketing workers. In the end, the Teamsters forced the strikers back to work without having achieved their modest demand for a \$1 per hour wage increase.

To organize opposition to the betrayals of the union and to link up the struggles of workers across the country, the *World Socialist Web Site* has helped workers across industries to build rank-and file-committees .



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