

# Teamsters union sells out Keurig/Dr Pepper/Seven-Up strike in Detroit

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Teamsters Local 337 has ended the strike of roughly 90 warehouse and delivery workers at the Keurig/Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Bottling Co (KDS) distribution facility in Redford, Michigan after 22 days, with none of the basic issues having been resolved. The contract ratification vote was conducted on March 31st and April 1st.

Workers were on strike since March 11 after their five-year contract ended in February. After weeks of dragging negotiations, the Teamsters were compelled to call a strike. Workers are opposed in particular to the existence of a multi-tiered wage structure including use of lower-tier non-licensed driver positions paid at half the normal rate, the status of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as an unpaid holiday and 12-hour mandatory shifts.

After over three weeks of striking, the tier system still remains. The company has agreed instead to a "pathway" to elevate second tier workers to tier one pay through "retirement, termination or death" according to a union steward. The use of a multi-tiered wage structure has been pioneered in recent years in the auto industry as a means of slashing wages while attempting to pit newer hires against older "legacy" workers.

The pay increases under the new deal are a meager 2.5 percent each year across all tiers. KDS management and the Teamsters agreed to cap non-certified drivers at 25 percent of the workforce, and they would not hire any more non-certified drivers until 2023. In fact, the proposal was presented by the Teamsters and approved by KDS.

In a comment to the media, recording secretary and business agent of the union Tony Reisdorf said, "through attrition, we were able to address our tier pay system. Workers also got pay raises across the board and they were able to maintain health insurance."

In reality, even the most minuscule demand of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a paid holiday was removed by the union in favor of a paid personal leave day.

Prior to this strike, full pay for warehouse workers was over \$20 an hour, but the pickets reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that anybody hired in after 2005 gets around \$16 by the two-tier system.

"We don't want [non-certified drivers]," one worker told the WSWWS last month. "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."

At one point during the strike, Michigan Democratic Party politicians like Rashida Tlaib, Haley Stevens and Debbie Dingell paid visits to the picket line to posture as supporters of the strike, while presenting the struggle in racial terms and promoting the PRO Act to strengthen the bureaucracy over the workers. Debbie Dingell, like her late husband and predecessor in office John Dingell, enjoys close ties to the union bureaucracy.

The stunt by the congresspeople represents their fear of the growing anger in the working class. It was Dingell's late husband and predecessor John Dingell who played a key role with the Obama administration's restructuring of the auto industry, supported by the United Auto Workers union in slashing wages for new hires.

This is only the latest sellout conducted by the Teamsters union. In 2018, the union rammed through a national contract at UPS in spite of a majority "no" vote, which created a new tier of lower-paid delivery drivers. Earlier this year, the Teamsters shut down a

strike by produce workers at Hunts Point in New York City without having achieved even the modest demand of a \$1 per hour wage increase.

Teamsters Local 337 also represents Sysco delivery drivers in Monroe, Michigan, who struck one year ago for their first contract. Like the KDS strike, the Teamsters called the Sysco strike over unfair labor practices. Rather than calling the entire workforce in a joint struggle, they isolated the KDS and Sysco workers.

The UAW, which has spearheaded with the auto companies the use of two- and even three-tier wage structures, worked to isolate the strike, calling only for a toothless boycott of Seven-Up/Dr. Pepper products.

The latest sellout by the Teamsters shows the need for workers to organize themselves independently of the union bureaucracy in order to oppose their betrayals and appeal for the broadest possible unity within the working class. The *World Socialist Web Site* has assisted autoworkers, Amazon workers and teachers in establishing such committees over the past year. For more information, visit [wsws.org/workers](http://wsws.org/workers).



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