

ABARTA Coca-Cola Beverages workers go on strike in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

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On Sunday, December 5, 77 ABARTA Coca-Cola Beverages (ACCB) workers—truck drivers, loaders and warehouse workers—walked off the job in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, after their four-year contract had expired. ACCB management is waging a ruthless cost-cutting campaign to unload health care costs and retirement benefits.

ACCB wants to substitute an inferior 401(k) plan for pensions, raise health care premiums with single-payer plans exceeding \$500 and family plans in excess of \$600 per month, while offering wage increases below inflation.

The corporation's 1,700 workers have risked their lives shipping Coca-Cola products throughout the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed 800,000 people in the United States and over 5 million internationally. According to ZoomInfo, ABARTA, the parent company headquartered in Pittsburgh, rakes in over \$300 million in revenue annually. Another report lists revenue at \$500 million annually.

ACCB formed in 2017 when it acquired exclusive sales and distribution rights of Coca-Cola products throughout Pennsylvania and parts of Ohio, New Jersey and West Virginia. It is the 10th largest privately-owned Coca-Cola distributor in the United States. Twelve of its 15 distribution centers are located in Pennsylvania.

Profit margins, like most companies throughout the pandemic, have increased substantially for ABARTA, emboldening its efforts to break the strike and further enrich management and shareholders.

In a provocative move, the company announced Tuesday that it put in place a scabbing operation in anticipation of a drawn-out strike: "We have a strong contingency plan in place that allows for continued production and delivery of our products to our

customers and consumers throughout the Lehigh Valley area during this time."

Workers have posted on social media that scabs are being transported across picket lines in vans by a local company, J&J Luxury Transportation, backed by the local police and hired security.

Teamsters Local 773, which includes ACCB workers as members, has no strategy to counter the company's strikebreaking tactics. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) apparatus has not made public that ACCB workers are on strike either on its webpage or on social media. It has made no appeal to the rest of the company's 1,623 workers, who remain on the job and, quite possibly, are unaware that the strike is currently underway.

The IBT's efforts to isolate striking ACCB workers is of a piece with the actions of the so-called unions more throughout the country and globe. The Teamsters has refused to unite any of its members' struggles which are happening concurrently.

Only a short distance from Bethlehem, Kellogg's workers in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, face a similar battle. Kellogg's workers are up against not only against the transnational corporation—which said this week it will permanently replace 1,400 striking workers—but also the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union (BCTGM).

One month before the Kellogg's workers struck, the BCTGM had sold out and shut down a strike by Nabisco workers, using a divide-and-conquer strategy to weaken the position of the working class. The union is also stoking anti-Mexican racism and American chauvinism, attempting to divide workers in the US from their brothers and sisters in other countries.

The strikes at Kellogg's and ACCB come on the

heels of a developing rebellion against the trade union bureaucracy by the rank and file. Earlier this year, workers at Volvo Trucks in Virginia rejected three pro-company contracts before the United Auto Workers (UAW) browbeat workers into re-voting on the same contract, passing by a dubious 17 votes.

Workers at Dana Inc. and John Deere rejected multiple sellout contracts before the union bureaucrats, using intimidation and poverty-level strike pay, were able to force through the demands of the corporations.

The Teamsters, whose leadership is comprised of well-paid, privileged executives whose incomes regularly exceed \$100,000 or even \$200,000 and \$400,000, lives in an entirely different world than its dues-paying membership. Like its counterpart the BCTGM, whose leadership took home more than \$4.6 million last year, the IBT is promoting poisonous nationalism.

The Teamsters has backed Democratic President Joe Biden's lying claims of a genocide being committed against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, invoking the hypocritical claims of "human rights."

In a statement released this week, the IBT called on the International Olympic Committee "to call out China" for its "violations of fundamental rights at work, in supply chains and in society" and "silence and obstruction over the spread of COVID-19."

Rather than promoting "human rights," the US government is trying to justify imperialist aggression abroad, against one of the few countries that has carried out a serious effort to eliminate COVID-19 within its borders. The US government's "profits over lives" policies, on the other hand, have doomed hundreds of thousands to an early death and many more to debilitating sickness.

In fact, it is the United States political establishment, including the AFL-CIO and IBT, that has kept workers on the job throughout the pandemic and engaged in "silence and obstruction." What little public health measures that have been implemented have largely been a product of workers taking matters into their own hands, as in the wildcat actions in the auto industry and elsewhere in March 2020 which forced the shutdown of some nonessential sectors of the economy, saving countless lives.

When workers who have risked their lives throughout the ongoing pandemic ask for better wages and

benefits, the same companies and unions have refused, despite the corporations making record profits.

The urgent task confronting ACCB workers is taking the struggle out of the hands of the Teamsters apparatus. Workers should organize a rank-and-file strike committee, which will fight for what workers want and link this struggle with Kellogg's workers and other sections of the working class both in the United States and international as part of the growing network of rank-and-file committees which have been formed at Deere, Volvo, Mack Trucks and Kaiser Permanente.



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