

Minneapolis-St. Paul airport maintenance workers authorize strike action

Jonas Boquist
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Maintenance workers at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and six surrounding reliever airports voted by a 95 percent margin December 12 to authorize strike action against the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC).

The 85 members of Teamsters Local 320 are demanding increased compensation, under conditions of soaring inflation, and benefits that correspond to other MAC workers. The current severance package for the maintenance workers is equivalent to 85 days' pay, while other airport workers receive severance equal to 200 days.

The contract between Local 320 and the MAC expires December 31. Negotiations, which have been going on for two to three months, will resume December 28 under the direction of a state mediator. Under state law, the airport workers will not be able to take strike action earlier than January 20.

The MAC workers perform maintenance on runways and security fences. They also clear runways of snow, something that can plague Minnesota airports during winter. Fox News raised the question of the necessity of the MAC to recruit strikebreakers: "If a strike does occur, it's unclear who would step in to help since the machinery and trucks that are used at the airport required specialized training to operate."

Teamsters Local 320 Secretary-Treasurer Brian Aldes told KSTP News that workers were "angry. They're fed up." He added, "If I was optimistic about the outcome of our negotiations, our potential outcome, we would not have had to take a strike authorization vote today."

The series of strikes that has been sweeping the United States and globally has revealed a new level of militancy among rank-and-file workers. But this militancy has been undermined by the union

officialdom, which has sabotaged and isolated strikes, attempting to block a broader mobilization of masses of workers.

The Teamsters, despite having over 1 million members, are notorious for segregating them into small units. Should a strike occur, they will seek to wear down workers until a contract acceptable to management can be rammed through, as was done to Hunt Point Market workers in New York and Keurig/Dr Pepper/Seven-Up workers in Detroit earlier this year.

Predictably, the Teamsters apparatus has issued no appeals to link up maintenance workers with wider sections of airline and airport workers—who are facing increasingly intolerable conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic—nor other sections of Local 320 workers involved in contract struggles, such as Minneapolis school bus drivers and state court reporters.

To counter the policy of union officials to isolate strikes, maintenance workers should study the recent experiences of autoworkers, teachers and other workers who have begun the process of establishing rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of their struggles out of the hands of the union bureaucracy.



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