

Iowa cement truck drivers' strike for higher pay enters second week at King's Ready Mix

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On Monday, May 2, cement truck drivers employed by King's Ready Mix in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, began to strike, after unanimously rejecting a contract proposal by the company. Somewhere between 16 and 18 drivers are involved in the action, according to local press reports, and are seeking substantial wage increases to offset inflation and years of stagnating pay.

Workers' current base pay rate is \$22.45 an hour. Teamsters Local 238 has stated it is demanding this be raised to \$25.70, but it is not clear how many years a new contract would cover and what annual percentage raise this would represent.

The strike at King's takes place as part of an international upsurge of strikes, protests and working class struggles. Faced with spiraling prices for food, gas and other basic necessities, growing numbers of workers around the world are seeking higher pay and improved working conditions. In Burlington, Iowa, and Racine, Wisconsin, roughly 1,200 workers at CNH, the global agricultural and construction equipment manufacturer, initiated a strike the same day as King's and are also seeking major improvements to wages and benefits.

King's driver Jim Hoyt, who has worked for the cement mixing company for 25 years, told local KCRG reporters that workers rejected one formally written offer and another verbal offer before making the decision to go on strike. "I think all the drivers should be able to afford their rent or mortgage every month, take a vacation once a year, and right now with the wages we're currently getting, we can't do that," Hoyt told the station.

King's, Inc. President Charlie Rhode predictably expressed the company's "disappointment" in the strike, claiming in a statement, "We have always had a wage-and-fringe benefit package that is fair and

equitable to our team and our offers have reflected that."

Teamsters Local 238 Secretary-Treasurer Jesse Case stated recently that the union is "hopeful for a resolution," adding, "It's important to keep the lines of communication open. We want a deal that's reasonable to both parties."

Such language has long been used by the pro-corporate trade unions to force through contracts entirely on the companies' terms, allowing them to drive down wages and shred pensions, health benefits, and other gains. In 2018, the Teamsters rammed through a sellout contract at UPS which created a new tier of low-paid hybrid driver-warehouse workers, despite a majority no vote by workers against the contract.

Founded in 1935, King's was acquired by US Concrete in 2016 for an undisclosed sum. US Concrete, founded in 1997 in Euless, Texas, is a major national construction company, with positions in cities such as Dallas-Fort Worth, San Francisco, New York City, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. among others. In 2021, the reported revenue for the corporation was over \$1.3 billion. US Concrete President and CEO Ronnie Pruitt reportedly made over \$3.3 million in 2020 with a base salary of over \$700,000 and an end-of-year bonus of over \$1.4 million.

US Concrete's stock price has skyrocketed over the last two years, as the Federal Reserve flooded financial markets with virtually free money, massively inflating share prices. At the beginning of the pandemic, the company's stock plummeted to just over \$5 per share, the lowest since the company went public in 1999. By April 2021, the value had risen to over \$78 a share.

In August 2021, US Concrete was acquired by Vulcan Materials, a deal valued at \$1.3 billion. Vulcan

recently reported their first-quarter aggregate sales totaled \$1.12 billion, an increase of more than 25 percent compared to their 2021 first-quarter sales.

With such large sums being made, there is simply no grounds for King's to claim that it cannot afford to massively raise workers' wages.

To win their demands, workers at King's must take matters into their own hands and seek to broaden the strike, appealing for support throughout the working class, including at CNH, John Deere, the meatpacking plants, among teachers and elsewhere.

The mobilization of workers' collective strength requires a network of rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-corporate unions. On Thursday, the newly formed CNH Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement calling for a \$10 raise and the restoration of cost-of-living raises and retiree health care, among other demands.



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