

Apple Store employees in Towson, Maryland vote to unionize

Nick Barrickman
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Apple store employees in the Baltimore suburb of Towson, Maryland voted on Saturday to become the first workers at one of the computer giant's 270 US retail outlets to join a union. The Towson workers voted 65-33 to join the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) after a month-and-a-half unionization campaign, which began in early May.

According to the *Washington Post*, "Towson Mall employees said they hope organizing will give them a seat at the table on things like coronavirus safety, hours and pay." The group will form a specific division of IAM called the Coalition of Organized Retail Employees, or "Apple CORE."

"We're literally the face of Apple," said employee Chaya Barrett to the *Baltimore Sun*. "How is it fair that we are being dictated as to what to do, what to say, how to act—but we don't get any say in any of the things that are happening in our everyday lives: our safety, our well-being, our mental health?"

The Apple employees are pressing for better work schedules and other improvements in opposition to the corporation's heavy-handed and oppressive practices. A worker told the *Post* that she is forced "to juggle her duties as a parent to three kids" with Apple's inflexible scheduling system. This is "forcing her to take vacation and sick days for routine child-care needs."

In addition, the average pay is only \$20 an hour for workers who require considerable technical skills to service Apple's customers. Wages have been kept low despite record revenues and profits in recent years.

The company's second quarter earnings in 2022 shows it made \$97.3 billion in revenue. This is an increase of 9 percent over the same period last year. After record profits in 2021 and early 2022, which the financial publication *Market Watch* said made Apple

"one of the biggest winners in the first year of the pandemic," the corporation has faced difficulties due to stock selloffs and slowdowns in its supply chain.

IAM President Robert Martinez Jr. celebrated the results publicly and called on Apple CEO Tim Cook "to respect the election results and fast-track a first contract." For their part, Apple has not announced whether it would try to appeal the vote. It is also possible that Apple will drag out negotiations for a first contract, leaving Towson workers without anything to show for their votes.

Other Apple stores in Atlanta, Georgia and New York City's Grand Central Terminal have also begun organizing drives. Organizers with the Communications Workers of America called off their drive in Atlanta, claiming Apple's "repeated violations of the National Labor Relations Act have made a free and fair election impossible."

Among retail and technology workers there has been an increased interest in unionizing. Workers at dozens of Starbucks coffee locations have sought to unionize while 8,000 Amazon workers on Staten Island, New York voted in late March to join the Amazon Labor Union.

Workers are looking for a way to collectively fight for livable working conditions, safety and dignity at their jobs. But the various organizations they are affiliated with do not provide them a way forward. Retail workers already unionized by many of the same organizations have seen their living standards drop throughout the pandemic and before. A stark statistic provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that nonunionized workers actually experienced *higher* pay raises (4.9 percent) than their unionized counterparts (3.5 percent) in the 12 months ending in March 2022.

As for the IAM, it has a long history of collusion with

corporate management and the betrayal of strikes and other struggles by workers at Boeing, in the airlines and other industries.

Apple workers in Towson only have to travel an hour north on Interstate 83 to Harley-Davidson's York, Pennsylvania factory where 1,000 workers unanimously rejected a contract proposal put forward by IAM Local 175 last week. The deal maintained the hated two-tier wage system, which robs younger workers of income, pensions and other benefits. Workers denounced IAM officials for ignoring their demands and pushing a pro-company proposal that did not "pass the smell check."

Speaking on the vote by the Apple workers, President Biden told reporters yesterday, "I am proud of them. Workers have a right to determine under what condition they are going to work or not work."

But Biden, a long-time shill for big business, knows the unions will not aid workers in determining their working conditions. Instead, he looks to the corporatist unions to suppress the growing tide of working-class opposition to surging prices, intolerable working conditions and the continued sacrifice of human life for corporate profit as the pandemic continues.

Sooner rather than later, workers at Apple, Starbucks, Amazon and other newly unionized workplaces will find themselves in a struggle not only against corporate management but against their new "representatives." That is why the fight for genuine workers' control over the shop floor and to vastly improve wages and benefits requires the formation of rank-and-file factory and workplace committees. Consisting of the most militant and class-conscious workers and based on the methods of the class struggle, not class collaboration, these committees will fight for what workers need, not what is acceptable to the corporations and their two political parties.



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