

Over 400 beverage distribution workers on strike in Philadelphia region weeks before July 4 holiday

Landon Gourov, Nick Barrickman
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On Saturday, June 19, 400 workers in the Teamsters Local 830 union voted 308-40 to reject the Delaware Valley Importers Distribution Association's proposal and go on strike.

Delaware Valley Importers Distribution Association is a consortium of Origlio Beverage, Muller Inc., and Penn Beer Distributors. In total, the three corporations generate around \$241 million in revenue.

Origlio Beverage handles distribution of nationally known beer brands like Coors, Corona, Angry Orchard, and Guinness, to name a few. Muller Inc. carries Miller Lite, Pabst Blue Ribbon, and Yards. Penn Beer carries brands like Budweiser, Michelob, and Natural Light. They also handle craft beers and seltzers.

The workers are opposed to the company's proposed work hours, which would make their workday 12 hours for five or six days consecutively. In addition, workers have rejected the company's offer of below-inflation pay.

"My husband is one of those workers on strike," said a woman in social media. "He works 14 hour days sometimes. Backbreaking work! The guys at the top want these workers to kill themselves but don't want to pay them for it." Another poster said that his uncle was one of the striking workers. "The man just turned 60 and is still having to fight for this."

A number of news publications have voiced concerns that the strike could upend the profits of local eateries and other venues during the July 4 holiday. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* titled an article "Local strike could impact availability of beer ahead of Fourth of July weekend" and NBC titled their article "A Dry 4th of July? Strike Could Cause Local Beer Shortage."

The July 4 holiday has taken on an ominous meaning

throughout the pandemic. Last year, Democratic President Joseph Biden infamously proclaimed that the country could celebrate its "independence" from the coronavirus, encouraging people to go maskless in celebrations that promoted the reopening of the economy and the spread of the Delta variant.

This year, that drive to reopen everything has been almost completed. The last 30 days in Philadelphia county have seen a large number of COVID cases, with 13,091 reported. An article on the *Inquirer's* website states "The permanent trend toward remote work is contributing to Philadelphia's tepid economic rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in the total workforce overall."

Within this context, the beverage distributors' struggle also takes on a broader political significance as it not only against distributors' association but also against the region's political establishment, including in Democratic Party in-led administration in Philadelphia.

The Teamsters local has sought to frame the issue as primarily about the length of shift times. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "The union would not release specific information about the current pay workers receive, what they are seeking, or what the association had offered them in the proposal that the union has rejected."

One purpose for the provocative wage offer is so that a below-inflation wage scheme can be imposed, perhaps with a slightly increased amount that the Teamsters can claim as a "victory."

Secretary-Treasurer Daniel Grace has said "The Delaware Valley Importers Distribution Association can end this impasse quickly by giving our members a

fair contract, one that accounts for the runaway inflation in America.”

The organization tweeted on Friday that President Sean O’Brien and Vice President Bill Hamilton had visited the striking workers on the picket line in a show of faux-solidarity. However, such photo-ops are mere window dressing for the effort to pull the plug on the strikers before the struggle spreads.

For its part, the beverage distributors’ association itself released a statement which said, “The negotiating committee of the union’s own members unanimously agreed to accept and endorse” the employers’ offer.

Teamsters are notorious for enforcing pro-company sellouts. In Cicero and Rochelle, Illinois, workers of Teamsters Local 710 voted 89-10 to reject a deal that Teamsters had made with Breakthru Beverage which would only moderately increase wages. A sellout contract for 3,000 car haulers was similarly endorsed by the organization, though it too maintained wages below inflation.



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