

Teamsters local abruptly ends Philadelphia beer distributors' strike

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On Saturday, Teamsters Local 830 announced that it had come to an agreement with the Delaware Valley Importing Distributors Association (DVIDA) and that a new four-year contract had been ratified for 400 beer delivery workers who had been on strike.

A joint statement produced by Local 830 and the DVIDA claimed the contract's "overwhelming ratification." Strikers had won "a fair and comprehensive agreement that includes significant wage and benefit increases and enhanced flexibility."

The announcement included news of a 10.5 percent wage increase the first year "plus additional increases each following year" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*). It did not say whether these raises would compensate for inflation, which is currently pushing 9 percent.

The local proclaimed that it had secured "increased pension contributions in the second, third and fourth years." Workers will also receive "additional 401(K) contributions, an additional paid holiday and new, reduced work hours."

Aside from the first year's wage increase, the only specific detail was that shift times would be limited to "five days with 10-hour time limits and two days with 11-hour time limits." This is in contrast to the previously-rejected Teamsters-backed offer which would have had drivers working 12-hour shifts for five days a week.

World Socialist Web Site efforts to contact the local for further details have so far gone unanswered.

The strike by beer distributors working for Penn Beer Sales and Service, Origlio Beverages and Muller, Incorporated, had heavily impacted Philadelphia, Bucks, Delaware, Montgomery and Chester counties, wrote ABC News. The local oversees nearly 3,100 members who work in warehouses, distribution and sales.

Throughout the strike, news organizations had been fearful that it would impact venues leading to and throughout the busy July 4 holiday. Significantly, ABC cites experts who had been warning that there "could have been an impact on the availability of some brands" had the strike continued for longer than a week.

The day before the strike concluded, Teamsters president Sean O'Brien had visited the distributors' picket lines. As the WSWs wrote at the time, "such photo-ops are mere window dressing for the effort to pull the plug on the strikers before the struggle spreads." This has now been confirmed.

The joint Teamsters-company announcement makes it clear that the strike was ended so that "beer will be flowing during the July 4th holiday, making it a happy one for the people of the Delaware Valley and the thousands of small businesses that rely on the beer industry for their livelihoods."

The statement is purposefully deceptive. The main businesses served by the DVIDA "big three" beer distributors are major business chains and establishments which stand to profit immensely during the July 4 holiday.

DVIDA distributes Miller beer products, Coors, White Claw, Budweiser, among others. According to NBC Philadelphia, "Penn [Beer] is also the exclusive supplier to the Philadelphia sports complex."

While the company and union cheer the strike's ending and the supposedly "great gains" made in the contract. Workers on social media explained in detail some of the real working conditions they face.

"Used to drive for one of the Big 3. Things were pretty bad when I left," wrote one worker. When asked to explain himself, he said his employer kept him at a "low top wage... no [health] coverage for... families, and

no PTO [paid time off].”

Another worker who said he worked at a wholesaler stated, “Everyone from the warehouse guys to the drivers/delivery and even the field sales guys have an extremely physically demanding job.”

“At any even time (whether with machine assistance of not),” he continued, “you are pushing/pulling/stacking cases of beer sometimes that is 1 at a time [and for] others it’s multiple pallets at a time. A lot of dudes had horrible backs/knees/shoulders.”

Speaking about his employer, he explained, “All the beer wholesaler owners of the big 3 are mostly loaded, like tens of millions dollars liquid-loaded, and very much removed from the day to day grunt work.” According to recent figures, the big three distributors corporations make more than \$241 million a year in revenue.

The strike is part of a much larger movement of the working class internationally against the ever-increasing costs of living and low pay which corporations are seeking to force on workers with the aid of the trade union bureaucracy.

Several days before the Teamsters called off the Delaware Valley beer distributors strike, the organization posted on its *Teamster.org* website that “Work stoppages at US Foods... are looming.” It stated that “contentious” contract negotiations are underway for members in Pennsylvania and Virginia. “At least 22 US Foods locations where the Teamsters have the right to honor picket lines in the event of a strike in Pennsylvania and Virginia” would be impacted if a struggle broke out.



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