

# In vote marred by irregularities, Teamsters ram through contract to shut down Philadelphia Coca-Cola strike

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8 May 2023

*Are you a Teamsters Local 830 member, or do you work for another beverage distributor? Tell us what you think about this contract by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

On Monday, officials from Teamsters Local 830 in Philadelphia announced that a third tentative offer from the company, announced the day before, had been ratified by nearly 400 striking workers at Liberty Coca-Cola. The workers had been on strike for just over three weeks.

In a statement, Local 830 secretary-treasurer Daniel Grace told WPVI, “Final details of the contract are still being hammered out at this time and will be released in coming days. Any and all boycotts of Coca-Cola products—real or perceived—have also ended.”

The way in which the vote was conducted made a mockery of workers’ democratic rights. The contract was announced less than a day before it was brought up for a vote. On Sunday, workers received a brief memo outlining several self-serving “highlights” as well as informing them of the voting time and location. It informed workers a contract ratification meeting was being held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with vote counting scheduled to take place immediately after.

In addition, the memo said that a “Voting Bus” would be sent to Liberty Coca-Cola’s facility on Erie Avenue and G Street in Juniata Park “for your convenience of Voting.” It added, “The ballot box will be secure in the bus with International Representatives watching it.” It is unclear how voting conducted on a bus, with union reps standing over workers as they cast ballots, was either secure or anonymous.

The contract offer included a ratification bonus of only \$1,000, a \$2 hourly pay increase in year one of the

contract followed by a \$0.55 hourly raise in years two through four, and finally, a \$0.60 hourly raise in year five. This amounts to a total raise of \$4.25 over the five-year proposed contract.

Additionally, the company is proposing no increases to employee health care contributions in years one through three of the contract, affecting health and wellness coverage from the 2024 through 2026 calendar years.

The memo only provided a highlight of the latest tentative agreement, specifically “changes from MOU [memorandum of understanding] dated April 27, 2023, if not noted otherwise, terms are consistent with the previously agreed upon MOU.”

Workers were enraged by the small wage increases. “Turn this crap down. Everyone is running out of soda, now they’re going to start getting pressure from customers,” one worker said on social media, adding, “20 cents more is a slap in the face. Stay strong.” Another commenter wrote, “Should be at least a dollar across the board at least”—meaning each of the five years of the contract—“vote that s-t down.”

Following the vote, workers declared that they had been on strike for “three weeks and got nothing!” Others called the contract “bullish-t.”

Others called attention to the union’s suspicious conduct of the vote: “It should be a vote in a hall with everyone together. Not in a bus on the strike line.” Another commenter agreed, “They count the ballots at 4 p.m. just in time to get the 6 p.m. in there and work. This is shady.”

Frank Keel, Local 830’s public relations director, took to social media to offer his “congratulations” on the suspicious offer’s ratification. Keel was formerly a

public spokesperson for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 98, which was led by John “Johnny Doc” Dougherty. Dougherty recently stepped down from the leadership after being charged for embezzling nearly \$600,000 of the local’s dues money.

In addition, local media appear to have been tipped off to the vote result before workers, with WPVI and WCAU posting articles with full statements from Liberty Coca-Cola and Local 830 about two hours after voting ended. This was before updates had been posted to the union’s official website or social media.

The entire process and circumstances surrounding the TA are illegitimate. Workers should demand both the full details of the TA and a re-vote, with rank-and-file control over the balloting. Workers should assert that any “contract” passed under these conditions cannot be considered binding on them.

The struggle must be taken from the hands of the Teamsters Local 830 officials. Workers at Liberty Coke should take matters into their own collective hands, forming rank-and-file committees, independent of the official local leaders, with intent to spread the strike to the workers of the industry and region.

Critically, workers at Pepsi Beverages in Wilmington, Delaware, have posted their solidarity with the striking Coke workers on social media.

Prior to the vote, Liberty Coca-Cola workers had been isolated by their local and the Teamsters leadership, which had shut down a potential parallel strike of fellow Coca-Cola workers in West Virginia as the Philadelphia struggle was occurring. The conditions of the Liberty Coca-Cola strike’s ending mirror Local 830’s sudden ending of a strike by several hundred beer distributors last year just in time for the July Fourth holiday.

The Teamsters’ conduct is a warning to United Parcel Service workers who are also having their contract bargained by the union. A massive sellout is being organized by the union leadership behind closed doors, with the Biden administration closely involved in the negotiations.



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