

Anheuser-Busch workers vote by 99 percent to authorize strike

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Five thousand workers at Anheuser-Busch in the United States voted by 99 percent on Saturday to authorize strike action against the top brewery company in the United States. The workers are members of the Teamsters union, and ship beer at 12 breweries across the country.

The current contract is set to expire at the end of February 2024. Contract issues include higher wages, job security and health and retirement benefits, although the Teamsters have not disclosed specific demands. But Teamsters officials have claimed that they have already reached a tentative agreement “to end tiered health care and restore retiree health benefits” per an official statement, indicating the union bureaucracy will attempt to block a strike, as it did at UPS over the summer.

In reality, Anheuser-Busch has reportedly stalled on negotiations. No new negotiations are scheduled, according to the company. AB has reportedly cut 750 jobs since last year. Teamsters members make up about a quarter of Anheuser-Busch’s US workforce.

The strike vote by Anheuser-Busch workers is part of a growing wave of strikes and working class unrest in the United States and internationally. According to Cornell University’s Labor Action Tracker, there were 424 work stoppages in 2022, involving 224,000 workers and totaling nearly 4.5 million lost work days. So far in 2023 there have 405 strikes, including 24 strikes involving more than 2,000 workers, up from 15 the year before.

Large strike votes have recently taken place at major airlines Southwest and American, while 1,100 workers at international cargo company DHL went on strike for 12 days this month. Earlier this year, 150,000 autoworkers authorized strike action against General Motors, Ford and Stellantis, and 350,000 workers at

UPS were prepared to strike this summer. Tens of thousands of writers and actors struck for months.

The strike vote at Anheuser-Busch is another expression of the growing resistance of the working class to demands from employers, Wall Street and the Biden administration that the working class pay to protect corporate profits. It is notable that one of the main issues in the contract negotiations with AB is job security. The Biden administration has attempted to suppress wage growth by forcing a rise in unemployment through interest rate hikes, and the WSWS recently reported that US corporations cut 700,000 jobs in November as part of a mass wave of layoffs. This included thousands of autoworkers, just weeks after the UAW pushed through a sellout contract that failed to meet workers’ demands for job security.

The American capitalist class is attempting to boost its profit margins by keeping wages down and forcing workers out of their jobs, making job security a major demand for workers.

The 5,000 AB workers are up against a multinational conglomerate worth \$110 billion. Anheuser-Busch is owned by AB Inbev SA, a Belgium-based corporation with operations around the world. AB Inbev was formed through a series of mergers, beginning with the combination of Belgian brewing company Interbrew and the Brazilian beverage company AmBev in 2004 to create InBev. InBev then bought Anheuser-Busch in 2008 to create AB InBev which subsequently acquired the South African company SABMiller in 2015.

AB Inbev produces 630 beer brands world wide, including some of the most popular beers in the US and Europe, such as Budweiser, Michelob, Corona, Juliper, Beck’s, Stella Artois, Leffe and Modelo. Many of AB Inbev’s products, especially Budweiser, have been among the best-selling alcoholic beverages in the

United States and globally, netting the company nearly \$58 billion in revenue and \$6 billion in profit in 2022.

AB Inbev rewarded its shareholders for this success by announcing \$1 billion in stock buybacks on October 31 of this year. US revenue is down 13.5 percent over last year but the company's stock price is up 4.9 percent from the start of the year. This exposes claims by the company that it does not have the money to meet workers' demands. The value of AB Inbev's stock buyback alone could afford to pay each worker in the US, union and non-union, an additional \$50,000 in compensation.

But it is not just the company that AB workers are up against. It is the Teamsters bureaucracy as well. It is following the playbook it set earlier this year at UPS, where the bureaucracy falsely claimed it was organizing a "strike ready" campaign before announcing a deal at the last minute. Despite claims by the Teamsters that the contract at UPS was a huge win, it was in reality a sellout that failed to meet the demands of workers. Part-timers were pushing for a minimum \$25 an hour, but their pay was increased to only \$21. Many workers have reported that the company is targeting senior workers for layoffs without any opposition from the union. UPS is also moving to significantly reduce its workforce through the implementation of automation at its facilities, which the contract does nothing to prevent.

Workers at Anheuser-Busch must take their struggle into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees, linking up with workers across other industries against the corporate assault on jobs, pay and working conditions.



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