

Contract deadline looms at month's end for 5,000 Anheuser-Busch workers in the US

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The contract for 5,000 Anheuser-Busch brewery workers in the United States is set to expire February 29. Workers voted by 99 percent to authorize strike action last December, which could take place at 12 breweries across the country.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters announced this month that it would double weekly strike pay for the brewery workers to \$1,000. The union has also staged rallies at breweries in New Hampshire, California and Florida, and more rallies are planned as the contract deadline draws near.

Workers at Anheuser-Busch brew, package and ship top-selling Budweiser and Bud Light, as well as other products. They maintain the breweries and are caretakers for the company's mascots, the Budweiser Clydesdales.

According to a model contract presented to Anheuser-Busch by the Teamsters, the union is seeking job protections, increased retirement benefits, an end to the two-tiered medical insurance plan, and increased wages. The model agreement was pre-ratified by 94 percent approval by workers.

Anheuser-Busch (AB) is owned by AB Inbev SA, a Belgium-based corporation with operations around the world. AB InBev produces nearly a quarter of all beer globally. In 2023, the company reported profits of over \$32 billion, up almost 2 percent from the year before. Budweiser is AB InBev's top brand and the world's most valuable beer brand, estimated at \$15.1 billion in 2022.

AB workers are correct to place job security at the top of their list of demands. As reported extensively by the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers are facing a massive wave of layoffs across all sectors as companies are looking to trim costs and boost profits. United Parcel Service announced 12,000 layoffs at the end of

January; 4,000 Stellantis workers in Detroit and Toledo worked their last shifts at the beginning of January.

Beer sales are down in the US, according to Beer Marketer's Insights (BMI). 2023 marked the lowest level of beer consumption "in a generation." AB is leading the downturn, due at least in part to the conservative backlash against AB's sponsorship deal last April with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney, which toppled Bud Light as the top-selling beer in the US.

But more fundamentally, the decline in beer consumption world-wide is attributed to inflation and the rising cost of beer. Additionally, some consumers are trending away from traditional beer products to high-end, craft beers and beer alternatives.

However, AB workers not only face challenges from the company; they are also contending with the Teamsters bureaucracy. O'Brien is using the same tactics seen during the UPS contract fight, when the bureaucracy put on a charade of organizing a "strike ready" campaign before ultimately reaching a last-minute sell-out deal.

Despite Teamsters' assertions that the UPS contract was a major victory, it not only fell far short of meeting workers' economic demands, it also paved the way for the mass job losses underway at the company.

Automation is a key weapon being used by corporate boardrooms in the latest rounds of layoffs. As the WSWs reported, UPS opened its massive Velocity warehouse in Louisville, Kentucky last November where 3,000 robots outnumber 200 human beings. This year, UPS has already eliminated day shift sorts in Baltimore, Louisville, Kentucky, and Portland, Oregon as the company keeps on pace to triple its investment in automation throughout its network.

Additionally, the Teamsters bureaucracy is courting

the far right, including seriously considering endorsing would-be fascist dictator Donald Trump for president. O'Brien met behind closed doors with Trump at Mar-A-Lago in early January where they were said to have held an "in-depth and productive discussion on workers issues."

The Teamsters later hosted Trump at its Washington D.C. headquarters on January 31 for a "candidate roundtable." In a press conference after the meeting, Trump stood at a podium emblazoned with the Teamsters' seal, railing against migrant workers who attempt to come to the US to flee poverty and violence in their own countries.

The union's efforts to align with Trump have incited considerable anger among workers who view both presidential candidates as the agents of the corporate ruling elites. Both Biden and Trump, Democrats and Republicans, are equally reprehensible for their antipathy towards the working class and their fealty to the increasingly unstable capitalist system.

The alliance between O'Brien and Trump should be a warning to the working class that fascism cannot be effectively resisted if workers remain under the influence of union bureaucracy and the two capitalist parties.

To oppose dictatorship requires the political independence of the working class and the fight for a socialist, internationalist and anti-capitalist program. Workers at Anheuser-Busch must take control of their struggle by forming rank-and-file committees and collaborating with workers from other industries to combat the corporate attacks on their jobs, wages, and working conditions.



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