

80 hour workweeks, heat strokes, coronavirus outbreaks: Striking Molson-Coors workers describe overwork, unsafe working conditions at Ft Worth brewery

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A strike by 420 Molson Coors brewery workers in Fort Worth, Texas continued into its fourth day Tuesday, following an overwhelming vote last week to reject an insulting contract offer and authorize a walkout. The offer workers rejected included an insulting \$1 per hour pay increase over three years.

The strike is the first at the plant since it was founded in the late 1960s. It also is taking place less than two weeks before a contract expires at the end of the month for 5,000 workers at Anheuser-Busch breweries around the country. Both the Fort Worth Molson Coors workers and the Anheuser-Busch workers are members of the Teamsters.

Molson Coors, as with many other large multinational corporations, is raking in record profits. The company reported a 9.4 percent increase in sales last year to \$11.7 billion. According to Molson Coors CEO Gavin Hattersley, “Molson Coors delivered six years of profit growth—six years of growth—in just one year.” A large portion of this money has been squandered on a \$2 billion stock buyback program announced in October of 2023.

The provocative “offer” by management and the strike in response takes place as workers around the world are fighting back against mass layoffs. The ruling class is using automation to gut jobs and smash the growing resistance of the working class, which has found expression in the substantial growth in strikes over the past half-decade.

At UPS, management announced 12,000 job cuts last month, in addition to continuing layoffs at its warehouses around the country as the company looks to consolidate its operations into a smaller number of high-tech hubs. The auto industry has also announced over 8,000 job cuts in the US alone, as the industry is using the shift towards

electric vehicles to cut a huge fraction of the global workforce.

“Right now in this country, it’s not just the beer industry. The blue collar workers are fighting to get their fair share,” one Coors worker told the WSWS. “We did our job during COVID. All we got was a t-shirt. Profits are through the roof. So why are we making less? We’re the ones that actually had to come in and work. Management worked from home.”

But the major corporations have relied heavily on the corruption of the trade union bureaucracy to prevent, isolate or sell out workers’ attempts to fight back. The layoffs at UPS were prepared by a sellout contract pushed by the Teamsters last summer, which it falsely presented as an historic victory. To date, neither the International union nor General President Sean O’Brien have uttered a word about the layoffs. The cuts in the auto industry are taking place only months after a similar contract was pushed through by the United Auto Workers.

Rank-and-file anger has compelled both the International and Teamsters Local 997 to adopt a militant public tone and to double strike pay to \$1,000 per week. However, such posturing was also made months in advance of the UPS contract, in order to present the sellout contract worked out with management as having been the product of a “credible strike threat.”

The struggle at Molson Coors has been limited in advance to an “unfair labor practice” strike, a narrow classification under US labor law which limits the ability of workers to raise economic demands. This gives the union bureaucracy the leverage to end the strike at any time without a contract on the grounds that the company is now “bargaining in good faith.”

Molson Coors workers must be on guard against any attempt by the Teamsters officials to prematurely end their struggle before their demands have been met. This requires the formation of a rank-and-file strike committee, consisting only of trusted workers on the shop floor without union positions. The committee will give workers the means to enforce the democratic will of the membership and countermand any decisions which violate it. It must also fan out and establish lines of communication with Anheuser-Busch workers and workers in other industries to develop a powerful movement from below, which is not controlled by any bureaucratic structures.

Similar committees have also been founded at UPS—which held an online meeting earlier this month to discuss a global strategy against layoffs—as well as in the auto industry and others.

“We work 16 hours a day, 7 days a week”

On Monday and Tuesday afternoons, WSWS reporters spoke to workers at the picket line about their struggle.

Dale, a machinist and operator with nearly 20 years seniority, said: “A big issue is they want to change the tier system, to make it even more like favoritism. Management wants to be able to pick whoever they want to get to the top tier. And they are giving us nothing for COLA.

“Automation has had a big impact here. When it first opened in the 1960s there were 1,600 workers at this facility. When I started working here, it was 700 people. Now we’re down to 400. They’ve rolled out new technology for packers and fillers. They have only four people or so on some of these can lines.

“The management here is poor. Their answer to everything is ‘faster is better.’ And they force us to work 16 hours a day. They’re making big bonuses and the company is making record profits, and yet they say there’s no money even for parts. The policy for equipment is to run it to failure. But then when things break down, the line is shut for days while they fly in replacement parts from England, Germany, or from other places in the US. How are we supposed to do our jobs without extra parts?

“We have problems with injuries. The sanitation in the building is bad. We have people who’ve broken or

sprained ankles from slips and falls, because the ground is so slick.

“The schedule is really hard on people. And now they want to change it to where instead of three eight-hour shifts [plus overtime], they would go to two 12-hour shifts. So basically that would get rid of four hours worth of overtime. So we would actually lose a ton of money.

“Most of us are bottom tier in the facility. Again, it’s really a system of favoritism, of picking who management likes best to put on the top tier.

“I love my job, the benefits are great. But that’s also something they want to get rid of. They want to move off the Teamsters plan onto an employer-sponsored plan. Our healthcare deductible would go up from \$2,000 to \$7,000. On top of that, it used to be that every hour you worked, 4 percent went into your retirement. Now, this is capped at 40 hours a week. No overtime counts towards retirement, even though we can be working 30 to 40 hours of overtime in a week.”

Dale also spoke with great concern about the pandemic. “We take COVID very seriously in our building. Everyone is vaccinated. They gave us \$5 more per hour during the pandemic to risk our lives during COVID. We had people die, some people are still out. This thing will never be over, at least the way they’ve handled it.”

Another worker concurred. “COVID was terrible in 2021 and 2022. I had a co-worker who was in her 70s who caught COVID. I thought she was going to die. The heat is also terrible in the summer. Last year we had a heat wave where it reached 110 degrees [43.3 °C]. We had two people suffer heat stroke.”

Asked what he would like to see in the next contract, he said, “The price of everything is going up. At the very least we need pay that keeps pace with inflation. We need more family time built into our work schedule. One time, I went six months before I had a day off.

“The companies everywhere are making billions. They’re reinvesting in automation, not people. We’re here to fight for our kids, for our future. I’m close to retirement, but I want to show them that we can stand together and fight.”



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