

# Apple Store workers in Maryland vote to strike

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Workers at the Apple Store in Towson, Maryland voted May 11 to authorize a strike against the multibillion-dollar technology and retail giant almost two years after becoming the first Apple Store to unionize.

Workers at the store, located in a mall in the suburbs north of Baltimore, voted in June 2022 to join the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers' Coalition of Organized Retail Employees (IAM CORE). The organization represents about 100 workers at the Towson store.

So far, no date has been set for when the strike might take place. IAM said it has been negotiating a labor contract with Apple since January 2023, but no agreement has been reached on key issues to workers at the store such as scheduling, work-life balance, and pay commensurate with the area's high cost of living.

Earlier in the year, IAM released the results of an independent survey of 161 current and former employees from 66 Apple stores in 60 cities across six countries, including the United States. The 38-page report found Apple is intensely hostile toward any effort to organize by workers and created conditions for retaliation against workers who attempted to do so.

The IAM survey found Apple broke unfair labor practice laws in order to prevent workers from taking up any fight against the corporation, such as by withholding benefits for workers at the Towson location or by interrogating employees in New York.

When workers at the Towson store first announced their intent to form a union, Apple hired Littler Mendelson, a company with a reputation for union-busting at Amazon, Starbucks, Nissan, and Delta Air Lines.

Regarding contract negotiations for the Towson workers, the IAM report hinted at the lengths to which

the company has gone to string workers along throughout negotiations.

Kevin Gallagher, a worker at the Towson store, said in the survey, "Apple has repeatedly done everything they can to delay negotiations as long as possible. They give lengthy presentations on irrelevant information, ask meticulous questions only to just respond no, and dedicate one or two days a month to bargain while insisting that we must submit proposals for every single benefit included at Apple. These have been clear attempts at delaying, a tactic they employed in every other legal battle they have ever undertaken."

The potential strike by these workers comes amid an upswing in activism within the tech industry. As students and demonstrators at universities around the world face brutal police retaliation for speaking out against the genocide in Gaza, Google had several employees arrested last month and fired dozens more for protesting the company's contracts with the Israeli government.

Apple is just as complicit in the ruling class policies of war and austerity. Under the guise of protecting children from exploitation, it has opened up its users' photo libraries and data to law enforcement agencies in the United States. Last year, Apple censored remarks by Robert De Niro about former President Donald Trump the company considered too inflammatory for the Gotham Film and Media Institute awards.

Apple's ties to the US military intelligence industry run deep. The corporation has supplied its technology for troop training, enemy targeting and myriad of other applications for many years.

Last year, the corporation acquired Mira, a California-based virtual reality technology company. According to *Forbes*, Apple's purchase signaled it was "attacking one of the most lucrative markets for high-end VR

headsets: the military.”

The corporation has a revolving door with the military. Last year, the Pentagon appointed former Apple executive Douglas Beck to head the military’s Defense Innovation unit. The position would report directly to the Secretary of Defense, indicating the military’s “ambition to access more cutting-edge technologies from the commercial sector,” stated *Fast Company*.

In December 2021, Apple employees at multiple stores walked out in protest of the company’s pay and benefits during a wave of COVID-19 infections. Earlier this year, hundreds of workers at the Flex manufacturing plant in Chennai went on strike. The plant manufactures iPhone components.

Workers must unite their struggles and expand them if they hope to take on Apple, a company valued at \$2.91 trillion with over \$170 billion in cash sitting in its bank accounts. The pro-capitalist and nationalist unions like the IAM are incapable of providing workers a way forward because more than anything they fear mobilizing the working class against the corporations. In its public statement on the vote to strike, IAM stated the date of a strike “will be determined by IAM CORE.” In other words, the initiative is being held back.

The IAM was one of several unions that worked with Congress and the White House to block a threatened railroaders’ strike in 2022. For months, the coalition of unions active in the railroads delayed decisive action in order to not interfere with the electoral aspirations of the Democratic Party in the midterms. Once the elections were finished, the unions stood by and let both big business parties pass legislation, signed by Biden, to outlaw the railroad workers’ job action on the grounds it would impose unacceptable burdens on “American families.”

In reality, corporate executives and the Biden administration were concerned that a mass struggle in a critical transport industry would not only decisively demonstrate the power of the working class, but it would weaken the US as it shifts its economy to a war footing against its rivals in China and Russia.

In that struggle, the role of the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee was crucial, debunking the propaganda of management and the government and exposing IAM and other unions’ collusion with the

state.

Technology workers at Apple and elsewhere should draw the conclusions from these struggles and take the initiative away from the IAM bureaucracy by forming their own rank-and-file committee to fight to expand their struggle as widely as possible.



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