

Teamsters push through sellout contract to shut down three-month strike at Molson Coors brewery in Fort Worth, Texas

Alex Findijs
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After three months on the picket line, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters ended a strike of 420 workers against the Molson Coors company in Fort Worth, Texas Wednesday afternoon. In a press release, the Teamsters announced that workers had ratified a new three-year contract with the company.

While the Teamsters have not released any details on the contract or the vote, it is clear that the rank and file were sold out and had a pro-company contract forced on them.

Molson Coors workers have reported through social media that the contract includes less than \$3 per hour raise over the three years and increased health insurance premiums. Based on the average wage reported by Molson Coors at the facility, this wage increase would amount to 8.3 percent divided over the three years. With inflation at 3-4 percent, this actually represents a cut in real wages.

Earlier, the company dug in its heels, offering a provocative wage increase of only 99 cents. Talks were resumed during the strike only to collapse almost immediately after the company only offered an additional nickel.

Outrage against the contract by rank-and-file workers prompted the Teamsters to take down their Facebook post announcing the contract in order to cover their betrayal.

The rank-and-file workers at Molson Coors carried out a courageous struggle, taking on the second largest brewer in the US and fourth largest in the world on their own. But over the three months, they were isolated by the Teamsters bureaucracy, even as the company continued production with management and scab labor.

Within the first few weeks of the Molson Coors strike, the Teamsters bureaucrats pushed through a sellout national contract for 5,000 Anheuser-Busch workers. That strike would have mutually reinforced the workers at Molson Coors, but the deal to block it contained only a 27 percent wage increase over five years and allows the company to close breweries. Despite being hailed as an "historic" contract, in reality it kept workers' wages below what they were in the 1990s and made paltry increases to health and retirement benefits.

But even if the Anheuser-Busch contract was everything the bureaucracy said it was, the deal to block a strike was a betrayal of Molson Coors workers. This left Molson Coors workers abandoned to fight the company entirely on their own, depriving them of support from other workers across the industry.

The Teamsters promoted an ineffective consumer boycott campaign instead of mobilizing the working class, or the more than one million members of the Teamsters to support the strike. While the Teamsters claimed the boycott would pressure the company to bargain, Molson Coors' first quarter report showed net sales increased 10.7 percent and pre-tax income increased 160 percent.

With the company seeing growth despite the strike, its determination to crush the resistance of the workers was reinforced.

However, the three month length of the strike shows that workers were prepared to fight back. Support for the strike reportedly remained at 93 percent after 11 weeks. The Teamsters bureaucrats needed a more aggressive strategy to break the strike on behalf of management.

At the end of April, the Teamsters removed the executive board of Local 997, claiming that they were “incompetent” and destroying morale. Having removed the local leadership the International leadership reportedly told workers that the strike was being changed from an Unfair Labor Practices strike (ULP) to an economic strike. ULP’s are a common strategy by union bureaucracies to avoid raising any economic demands.

Since the charge against management is that they are engaging in an unfair labor practice, the strike was entirely directed towards resuming “good faith” negotiations. This prevents raising economic demands, but also adds protections against the replacement of workers by management.

Under an economic strike, workers can raise economic demands but management may also permanently replace workers. However, the union can demand the unconditional reinstatement of all union members as part of the agreement to end the strike. However, workers have reported that it was the Teamsters telling them they would be replaced if they did not ratify a new contract.

If true, this was economic blackmail by the Teamsters leadership. If workers jobs are at risk under an economic strike it is only because the union refuses to defend them.

The administration of Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien was hailed by pseudo-left forces as signaling the beginning of a democratic revival within the unions, when it took office in 2022. In reality, it is a seamless continuation of the right-wing, pro-corporate union bureaucracy.

The entire bureaucratic apparatus, which takes hundreds of millions of dollars in workers’ dues each year to enrich itself, has no interest in the defense of workers’ living and working conditions. As a pro-corporate labor contractor, it has entirely different social interests than the working class. As a socially parasitic caste that feeds off of the working class, it has time and time again sided with management and forced sellout contracts on the membership.

This is demonstrated in the UPS contract, which the Teamsters hailed as an “historic” agreement, that actually failed to meet workers demands and is allowing management to destroy thousands of jobs through the implementation of automation. Similarly,

the Teamsters allowed 22,000 of its members to be laid off at Yellow, which declared bankruptcy last summer, without so much as lifting a finger. It even called off strike action against the company when it failed to make required contributions to the pension fund, allowing management time to prepare the company’s assets for auction to Wall Street vultures, generating more than \$2 billion for investors.

These repeated experiences show without a shadow of a doubt that the Teamsters bureaucracy is on the side of management, acting as a labor police force to prevent strikes and then to sell them out when they do occur.

Bureaucrats like O’Brien are acting ever more brazenly in the service of capitalism as a whole, with United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain shilling for “Genocide Joe” Biden and pledging autoworkers support to the war effort against Russia, Iran and China.

In order to wage a genuine struggle against attacks on jobs, pay and benefits, workers must organize independently of the trade union bureaucracy. Workers around the world are building rank-and-file committees, new democratic organizations, to build an independent movement of the working class and to enforce the will of the rank and file.

Workers cannot place their hopes in one bureaucrat or another, they must organize and act according to their own independent interests and break the stranglehold of the union apparatus over the struggles of the working class. That is the chief lesson of the Molson Coors strike.



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