

Amazon and Starbucks strikes in US portend escalation of global class conflict in 2025

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The holiday season has begun in the United States, along with the season of class struggle. Thousands of Amazon and Starbucks workers are on strike, with many more seeking to join.

The *World Socialist Web Site* supports these strikes and calls for the mobilization of workers behind them. This is not just a struggle of two sections of the working class but a fight of vital concern to all workers. And it is a signal of a trend that will intensify globally in 2025.

Amazon drivers in New York City, Atlanta, Southern California, San Francisco, and Skokie, Illinois are on strike, according to the Teamsters. This is reportedly the largest strike in the company's history. Drivers are demanding employee status, livable wages and an end to the Uber-style rating system that controls their work schedules.

In Queens, New York, drivers employed by 20 subcontractors are striking together. They earn around \$15 per hour, far below the living wage for a single parent in New York City (\$56.42 per hour). Similar conditions exist at the JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island, where 5,500 workers voted for union recognition in March 2022.

The Teamsters union has largely sidelined JFK8 workers, limiting the strike to symbolic protests despite Amazon's refusal to negotiate a contract. Teamsters leaders hope to convince Amazon that union recognition and marginal improvements will reduce the company's massive turnover rate and prevent future strikes by the company's 1.1 million US workers.

The union wants the same cozy relations with management it enjoys at UPS, where it is helping to carry out mass layoffs as part of an Amazon-style restructuring. Amazon workers, by contrast, want a serious struggle to halt operations and achieve their demands.

On Monday, Starbucks baristas in Boston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Portland, Oregon joined strikes that began December 20. The strike has now impacted 50 stores in

12 major cities, including Seattle, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City and Philadelphia.

Starbucks Workers United, which covers workers in 525 stores, says the company is refusing to negotiate seriously. Despite \$3.76 billion in 2024 profits, Starbucks is offering most baristas no immediate raises and only 1.5 percent guaranteed future increases. Starbucks rejected demands for higher wages, calling them "unsustainable." The company claims its meager \$18 per hour average pay and benefits are unmatched by other retailers.

Both Amazon and Starbucks are gigantic global corporations. Amazon, with its vast workforce spanning over 50 countries, dominates sectors like retail, logistics, technology and entertainment. Starbucks, with over 360,000 employees and a presence in 80 countries, is second only to McDonald's in market capitalization for food service companies.

Both are controlled by a capitalist oligarchy that profits off the exploitation of the working class. Amazon owner Jeff Bezos, with a net worth exceeding \$241 billion, and former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, whose wealth is estimated at \$3.2 billion, epitomize the vast chasm between the ultra-rich and the working class.

The fight against these corporations and the ruling class as a whole requires the mobilization of the collective strength of the entire working class. The **International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees** (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build a counter-offensive of the rank and file through the establishment of committees in every workplace.

These committees must organize the necessary actions to abolish the "make rate" system at Amazon, end the casualization of labor at both companies and secure livable wages for all workers. Through the IWA-RFC, workers will establish direct lines of communication and coordinate their struggles across national borders. These committees will fight for workers' power against

management attacks and sellouts by union officials.

Organizing a struggle on such lines, outside of which major gains by workers against these global corporations are unthinkable, requires a struggle by workers to take control out of the hands of the pro-management bureaucrats. The only concern of the bureaucrats in the apparatus that controls the unions is to preserve their political connections and six-figure salaries.

Not since the Gilded Age of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the rule of Carnegie, Rockefeller and other robber barons has it been so apparent that the working class is confronting a capitalist oligarchy, which exercises total control over economic and political life. Millions of working people are increasingly aware they will have to fight this oligarchy or be enslaved by it.

All of the indices of social distress—declining real wages, unemployment, poverty, hunger and homelessness—have worsened over the last year. But for the ruling class, 2024 has been a bountiful year.

“It’s been an astounding year for billionaires, with more than half of the planet’s 2,800-plus members of the three-comma club getting richer in 2024,” *Forbes* reports. The year’s top 10 billionaire gainers increased their wealth by \$730 billion, *Forbes* estimated, with Elon Musk, the world’s richest person, surpassing \$400 billion.

The incoming Trump administration is a selection of oligarchs where being a billionaire or mega-millionaire is the first requirement for appointment. But the plans of Trump, Musk and the other billionaires to deport tens of millions of immigrants, slash trillions from social programs and destroy the social and democratic gains won by the working class in generations of struggle will encounter massive resistance.

The struggle against the Trump government will also lead to a conflict with the bureaucracy. Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien has been at the forefront of a wave of union officials declaring their support for the policies of Trump, especially endorsing his toxic “America First” nationalism.

The class struggle is emerging as the driving force of political events. This past year saw a surge in global class struggle. Massive protests erupted against the US-backed Israeli offensive in Gaza. General strikes against austerity and repression swept across Argentina, Guinea, Nigeria, Greece, and Italy. In Northern Ireland, 150,000 public sector workers staged the largest strike in over half a century. Significant strikes also occurred in South Korea (Seoul transit, Samsung), Sri Lanka (railway workers), Chile (copper miners), Brazil (portworkers), Turkey

(metalworkers, miners), Germany (Lufthansa, VW), Britain (rail and airport), France (port, rail and public sector) and Mexico (steel and autoworkers).

In the United States, strikes included AT&T telecom workers in the Southern states, nearly 40,000 University of California academic workers defending their students against arrest for protesting the Gaza genocide, the two-month strike by 33,000 Boeing workers, and the walkout by 47,000 port workers on the East and Gulf Coasts. In Canada, thousands of Saskatchewan educators and railroad, port and Canada Post workers struck.

The Amazon and Starbucks strikes are an initial indication of the storm of class conflict coming in 2025. In the US, this includes renewed struggles by dock workers, railroad workers, educators and healthcare workers.

The connection between the attacks on workers at home and the expanding wars by US and world imperialism for the domination of raw materials, markets, profits and cheap labor are becoming clearer than ever. Trump’s rantings about taking over the Panama Canal and the Democrats’ war-mongering against Russia go hand in hand with the plans to deploy the military against immigrants and the “enemy within,” i.e., the working class.

The running amok by the world’s billionaires, backed by the entire political establishment, has made it clearer than ever that the very survival of mankind, let alone the resumption of human progress and achievement of social equality, depends entirely on the expropriation of the billionaires and ending of their dictatorial control over society.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges the widest possible support for the striking Amazon and Starbucks workers and the building of the IWA-RFC to organize a powerful industrial and political counter-offensive of the working class in the New Year in the United States and throughout the world.



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