

Two striking Philadelphia municipal workers struck by vehicle overnight; city's Fourth of July festival upended by strike

Nick Barrickman
4 July 2025

Philadelphia's municipal work stoppage entered its fourth day Friday, impacting the "Welcome America" Fourth of July festival as multiple headlining performers pulled out of the event, declaring solidarity with the striking workers. Over 9,000 city employees in AFSCME District Council 33 remain on strike into the weekend.

On Thursday night, two striking sanitation workers were struck by a suspected drunk driver late Thursday night in the Port Richmond neighborhood. According to police, a 40-year-old man driving a Chevy Tahoe jumped the curb, hitting a 36-year-old man and a 30-year-old woman who were seated in chairs on the picket line.

The male victim suffered critical injuries, including severe head trauma, and underwent surgery overnight. The woman, who is pregnant, was fortunately treated for less serious injuries and is expected to recover. Police are investigating to find if there were any motives behind the incident.

The incident occurred as negotiations between the city and union leaders remained stalled, with both sides trading blame for the deadlock and no new talks scheduled.

On Friday, the city's Fourth of July Welcome America festival ended in a debacle, as the event drew minimal crowds and multiple performers exited the lineup, declaring their support for the strike.

"Driving down the street was like driving in Spring 2020 [during the initial covid lockdowns]," said a Philadelphia resident to the *World Socialist Web Site* of the scene near the festival. "There were almost no cars on the road. I could have parked anywhere I wanted."

Meanwhile, strike pickets have been met with mass support throughout the city, with workers defying court injunctions restricting the number of picketers per location.

"We started off at maybe 40-50 DC 33 members when I had arrived earlier this morning," said a striking municipal worker to the WSW. "By after 1pm more DC 33 members came to join us as well as citizens of Philadelphia... to support our cause."

"By around 2pm, the crowd size tripled from the previous hour, with Philadelphia citizens coming over to ask if there was anything we needed [and] how they could support our cause in any way."

On Thursday, headlining performer LL Cool J pulled out of the July 4 event, declaring that he would not perform while the strike continued. On Friday, Philadelphia-based R&B singer Jazmine Sullivan also pulled out of the venue hours before she was due to take the stage.

"I do honestly believe that [the performers' refusal to take the stage] took the sizzle off of people deciding to attend the festival for this evening," a striking worker said.

Wawa's Welcome America festival is one of the largest Fourth of July celebrations in the United States, spanning weeks and bringing in massive revenue for the city. The 2025 celebration cost the city upward of \$2 million to hold and is viewed as a test run for next year's 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, according to PhillyVoice.

Democratic mayor Cherelle Parker told news cameras that "this is a challenging time for our city right now," in the run up to the event. Despite the massive rebuke she has received, the mayor reiterated her goal to negotiate a "fiscally responsible" deal with the city's lowest paid workers—i.e., one which keeps them mired in near-poverty.

The collapse of the Welcome America concert finale is a significant blow to the city's Democratic Party

administration. It reveals the real balance of political forces in Philadelphia as masses of people have lined up in support of the striking municipal workers. It testifies to the necessity to expand the strike, as teachers, white collar workers and transit system workers have also demanded that their forces be unleashed and combined in a common struggle.

On Thursday, Parker brushed off the mass opposition she has received, declaring at a press conference: “You can threaten me with not supporting me if I decide to run for reelection. You can call me a one-term mayor. But I’ll tell you what I will not do. I will not put the fiscal stability of the city of Philadelphia in jeopardy for no one. If that means I’m a one-term mayor, then so be it.”

The fact is that Parker and her administration are terrified of the possibility of a general strike emerging among the city’s public workers. Not only is Parker terrified, so are the AFSCME officials. In order to stop their struggle from being sold out, Philadelphia municipal workers must begin forming independent rank-and-file committees, exclusive only to themselves and other workers who genuinely support building their struggle, in order to take the conduct of this struggle out of the hands of the misleadership of union officials.

Under conditions where the strike has gained massive support, with a potential to spread far beyond its current stage, the AFSCME leaders have sought to limit the strike movement.

On Tuesday, the contract for 3,000 white collar municipal workers in AFSCME District Council 47 expired, raising the possibility of a unified strike of blue collar and white collar workers. Instead, DC 47 officials struck a last-minute deal with the city to extend the contract for two weeks, blocking a joint fight.

“We are the same staff [Parker] took remote work away from last year and DC 33 was her best friend because they worked every day [during the pandemic]” said a Philadelphia white collar worker. “Now DC 47 is her best friend because we aren’t on strike, in the office basically being held hostage.”

The entire trade union apparatus is seeking to smother the strike movement. Last month, 14,000 Philadelphia public school teachers voted to strike in the coming school year if their contract demands are not met. Their leadership has tried to play down the strike vote, appearing jointly at events with city officials and presenting themselves as partners as they seek state funding for the School District of Philadelphia.

Transport Workers Union Local 234 has said nothing

about mobilizing its 5,000 members in common strike action with city workers. This is even as the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) just passed a “doomsday budget” aimed at cutting transit services in the Philadelphia region, and even as TWU 234 leader Brian Pollitt held a rally with DC 33 officials the day before the strike began.

The union leadership least of all wants to see the development of a mass movement in Philadelphia, jeopardizing the labor bureaucrats’ own cozy relations with the Democratic Party machine that runs the city. Such a movement would also risk threatening the capitalist ruling class whom they defend.

Since the strike began on Tuesday, DC 33’s leaders have strung the striking workers out with miserable strike pay of only \$200 a week. This, despite the fact that the union possesses assets totaling \$27 million and the national AFSCME union has assets of \$300 million. The union has welcomed the mayor’s injunctions as a means to police the workers, stating “these legal directives are crucial and must be adhered to without exception.”

On Thursday, in the latest sign that DC 33 leaders are weakening the strike to prepare a sellout, union president Greg Boulware told the Philadelphia *Inquirer* that the union was no longer demanding 8 percent annual raises for its membership.

According to Boulware, the union’s new “plateau number” was 5 percent annual raises, or only \$2,300 more a year for a worker making \$46,000 on average. In this scenario, workers would only be making \$920 more a year than under mayor Parker’s current offer of 3 percent yearly raises.

The *Inquirer* cites Philadelphia building trades union leader Ryan Boyer, a close ally of both mayor Parker and AFSCME DC 33. According to Boyer, “the economics are not that far apart” between what the city and union are demanding. “By the time negotiations broke off before the strike began, the gap between their annual wage increase proposals had come down from 6 percentage points to just over 2 percentage points.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact