

Anheuser-Busch to close 3 breweries in the US, affecting hundreds of jobs

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Anheuser-Busch (AB), America's largest brewing company, has announced plans to close three facilities across the country. AB will shut down the 50-year-old complex at Fairfield in the San Francisco area, cutting 238 jobs; its Merrimack, New Hampshire plant, cutting 124 jobs; and its 75-year-old facility in Newark, New Jersey will be sold to the Goodman Group to be repurposed for industrial manufacturing and logistics, affecting over 110 employees.

Together, around 475 workers will be affected.

Beyond the immediate loss of jobs there will be ripple effects to other industries. The workforce development board for Fairfield stated that the brewery closure will cut more than \$10 million in tax revenue to the city and contribute to an additional 306 job losses. Furthermore, as the largest water user in the city, local officials expect that the closure of the plant will disrupt water utility finances and result in higher rates for the rest of the community.

These brewery closures come as nationwide job losses for the year surge past 1.2 million in total. The holidays have seen no letup in the jobs massacre, three in 10 companies are planning layoffs before the new year, according to one poll. The capitalist class is using emerging artificial intelligence technology to lay off vast sections of the workforce, in an attempt to pay for unsustainable levels of debt and prop up financial bubbles by intensifying exploitation of the working class.

In announcing the closures, AB has stated that employees will be offered jobs at other locations or a severance package if they decide to not relocate. These provisions were included in last year's national contract with the Teamsters union—covering 5,000 workers at AB, including at the Newark location—passed last year. Their existence, which the

union crowed about in statements to encourage ratification, indicated that the Teamsters were fully aware of plans to implement plant closures, although it did nothing to warn workers.

While the relocation packages will preserve some jobs, it is not clear how many workers are willing to relocate their families across the country, or what positions will be available to them. Neither the contract nor the company's statements indicate that workers will be guaranteed a position in their craft or current level of pay. The contract language only lays out terms for a nondescript "maintenance workforce" and "nontraditional work."

Closures began just a month after the contract was passed, when AB sold off its two facilities at Medford, Massachusetts and Canton, Ohio. At Canton, workers were denied their bumping rights to new positions at other facilities. At Medford, 100 workers were denied severance packages, according to local news reports.

These facility closures are part of a broader strategic realignment from management at AB's parent company, AB InBev, a multi-national conglomerate of beer companies that bought Anheuser-Busch in 2008 and is the largest brewing company in the world.

The company said in a statement that it had invested \$2 billion in its other 100 facilities around the country, which will absorb production from the closed facilities.

AB InBev is seeking to pivot to emerging and developing markets, particularly in Latin America, Africa and China where it can leverage its market dominance to fuel growth. In developed markets such as North America and Europe, AB InBev is seeking to consolidate and streamline its infrastructure to adapt to trends of reduced alcohol consumption, especially among young people, and preferences for "beyond beer" products like hard seltzer and non-alcoholic

drinks that are growing in sales.

Part of this strategy is the turn to “premiumization,” the cooling down of cheap, mass market beers like AB’s flagship Budweiser brands and increased focus on premium brands like Michelob Ultra. AB InBev plans to increase Michelob Ultra production at its Van Nuys facility in Los Angeles. Van Nuys is the target of millions of dollars in investment to increase production and absorb much of the capacity from Fairfield.

These trends reflect a general decline in beer sales, from 192 million barrels in 2015 to 158 million in 2024, according to the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. The Brewers Association reported that 2024 saw more brewery closures than openings for the first time since at least 2010.

AB InBev still posted profits in the billions this year, but has seen reduced profitability compared to recent years. By shedding what it deems to be suboptimal facilities, paired with modernization of its larger ones, AB InBev hopes to increase profitability by squeezing out profit growth and chasing higher yield markets. This will shift the cost of the transition onto workers who will either lose their jobs or be forced to move across the country with little to no guarantee of the quality of the job that awaits them.

Workers at AB InBev must fight against these closures and the near certainty of more to come. This fight will take place against both management and the Teamsters bureaucracy, which is doing nothing to fight layoffs.

To oppose brewery closures and job cuts workers must organize independently of the union apparatus, building rank-and-file committees to take matters into their own hands and return power to the shop floor. This struggle must connect with other sectors of workers facing layoffs in a global movement. Workers should contact AB InBev workers across the the company’s global footprint, to prepare for a worldwide counter offensive against the destruction of jobs and living conditions.



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