

Starbucks workers launch strike to protest anti-union bullying



?Starbucks employees say they're seeking better pay, more consistent schedules and higher staffing levels in busy stores [Matt York/AP Photo]????

Los Angeles, December 17 (RHC)-- In their largest labor action to date, Starbucks workers across the United States launched a three-day strike on Friday with the goal of forcing the coffee giant to bargain in good faith with hundreds of newly organized shops and put an immediate end to its unlawful union-busting efforts.

Starbucks Workers United said in a statement that roughly 1,000 baristas from approximately 100 unionized shops nationwide will walk off the job starting Friday, and a majority of the workers taking part in the action will remain on strike through Sunday.

The walkouts come as Starbucks continues to close stores engaged in union activity and fire labor organizers, drawing a flurry of legal complaints from the funding-starved National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Earlier this month, the NLRB said Starbucks is violating labor law by refusing to negotiate with its hometown Seattle Roastery, where employees voted to unionize in April.

The NLRB is also pushing for a nationwide cease-and-desist order against Starbucks over its union-busting conduct.

None of the more than 260 Starbucks locations that have voted to unionize since December 2021 have been able to reach a contract deal with management, which Starbucks Workers United said is carrying out a "ruthless campaign of anti-union bullying."

Michelle Eisen, a barista from the Elmwood Starbucks location in Buffalo, New York, said in a statement that company executives "sent a clear message when they closed the Broadway and Denny store," referring to the first unionized Starbucks shop in Seattle.

"They're doubling down on their union-busting, so we're doubling down, too," said Eisen. "We're demanding fair staffing, an end to store closures, and that Starbucks bargain with us in good faith."

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) said Friday that he stands "in strong solidarity with Starbucks workers on strike today." "It is absurd that [Starbucks CEO] Howard Schultz -- a guy worth billions of dollars -- is pulling out all the stops to deny decent wages and dignity on the job to the very workers who helped him amass his wealth," Sanders added.

Unionized Starbucks workers have accused the company of illegally denying new benefits to organized workers, terminating union organizers, and using bad-faith stalling tactics to sabotage contract negotiations.

As Bloomberg reported Friday, contract talks at a unionized Knoxville, Tennessee store "began last week and ended within minutes when company representatives walked out over a dispute about the union's desire for some workers to be able to participate via Zoom." Starbucks officials have similarly derailed negotiations in Buffalo, Chicago, and other locations.

Austin Locke, a Starbucks Workers United member in Queens, New York, told In These Times that the goal of the three-day national strike is to "bring more attention to the fact that Starbucks is not bargaining with us."

"Every bargaining date they've given, they've shown up, and then they've walked out," said Locke. "At every turn, they've said they're not going to recognize the union, they're not going to bargain with the union."

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