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USA

Starbucks Workers Continue Strike for Union Contract

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Thousands of Starbucks workers continue their fight for a union contract with strikes and rallies across the country. The latest strike began on November 13 and continues off-and-on at stores across the country. In mid-December some 3,800 Starbucks baristas were on strike at more than 180 stores in over 130 cities. The union, Starbucks Workers United claims a total 14,000 members at about 650 stores.

The prolonged strike began with the "Red Cup Rebellion" on November 13, 2025, a one-day strike called on the day that the company offers its customers a free, reusable red cup. The strike has been going on in some locations since then. Workers are demanding higher pay, increased staffing, and an end to unfair labor practices.

In Manhattan in mid-December, Starbucks union members demanded to meet with corporate executives in their offices in the Empire State Building. The execs refused and the 500 workers and allies blocked the entrance—and some were arrested.

Rey Shao, a barista at the NYC rally, told Labor Notes, "We need more take-home pay, we need better hours... Bring us new proposals that actually address these issues so we can finalize a contract."

The strike has won the support of socialist celebrity political leaders such as mayor-elect of New York City Zohran Mamdani, Senator Bernie Sanders, and Seattle's mayor-elect Kate Wilson. Joining a picket line in Seattle, Wilson called for a boycott, saying, "I am proud to join them on their picket line and proud to say loud and clear, I am not buying Starbucks and you should not either." She then led the rally in the popular chant, "When workers' rights are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!" Similarly, Mamdani posted, "While workers are on strike, I won't be buying any Starbucks, and I'm asking you to join us." One hundred members of Congress support the strike as do many local officials.

Starbuck Workers United is affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has two million members in the United States and Canada, the second largest union in the United States.

At present, the company and the union are not negotiating, both sides believing the other is uncompromising.

There is widespread support in the United States for unions and for the Starbucks campaign. But it faces an uphill battle, fighting a multibillion-dollar corporation that is also at this moment in an economic crisis. The campaign began in December 2021 in Buffalo, New York where the workers' union was first legally recognized. Since then, 640 stores have been organized—but not one has won a union contract.

While the union claims 14,000 members at about 650 stores, this is only a miniscule portion of the company's 200,000 baristas working at over 17,000 stores in the United States. To prevent union organization and contract negotiations, Starbucks has engaged in harassment, fired workers, and closed stores. Because of such illegal actions, Starbucks agreed recently to pay \$35.5 million, plus \$3.4 million in civil penalties, for violating New York City's Fair Workweek Law. But that's an exception to the rule nationally.

Starbucks, despite its size and ubiquity, is currently facing a financial crisis and is in the process of a \$1 billion corporate restructuring. In the midst of this, its revenues have increased by 5.5%, but its profits have fallen by 85%,

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to just \$133 million. As a result, the company has laid off almost 2,000 non-retail employees (that is, not baristas) and is closing 400 stores, about 1% of all retail outlets. Starbucks corporation hopes to stabilize next year, but in the meantime its current crisis will only make it more stubborn.

The union is equally determined. And so, strikes and rallies go on, extending throughout the country. The workers' signs read, "No contract, no coffee."

14 December 2025

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