

Coke employees team up with community in powerful strike

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In an amazing display of courage, solidarity, and strength, approximately 500 Coke employees from 6 Teamsters Locals across Western Washington went on strike on August 23 in response to the Company's surveillance and intimidation of its employees and its refusal to bargain a contract in good faith.

The strike was a rallying cry for Union members and a wake-up call for Coke. With their actions, striking workers sent a powerful message to their employer that they will not tolerate the Company's refusal to bargain in good faith over critical issues, such as maintaining reasonable health care coverage for Coke employees and retirees.

"Our actions have demonstrated to Coke the value of our professionalism and our labor and that we expect the company to take the collective bargaining process seriously," said Blaine Parks, a 32-year driver for Coke's production and distribution facility in Bellevue.

The Coke strike was an unmitigated success. Hundreds and hundreds of Coke employees, family members, and community supporters walked the picket line at 6 locations. Not a single Union member crossed.

Although Coke spoke of a "contingency plan", it was clear from the start that they had none. Scab replacement drivers, many of whom had no business operating company vehicles, struggled to deliver the product. Retail shelves throughout the region were bare and production levels dropped below 20%.

At Coke's facility in Bellevue, Union members engaged in organized ambulatory picketing. Groups of "scab trackers" followed non-Union drivers and picketed their trucks as they attempted to make deliveries. In many cases, customers refused to accept deliveries outright or slowed the delivery process to a standstill in solidarity with the striking workers.

Union members' actions also gained unprecedented community support. Community members supported striking workers on the picket line and at a series of other Union actions, including leafleting activities at the Seahawks and Sounders games at Qwest field.

Community support in all of these actions has helped gain considerable leverage in bargaining.

Your Union will continue to pursue the Unfair Labor Practice charges brought against Coke before the National Labor Relations Board.

Negotiations are scheduled to resume on September 28. Thank you again to all Union members for your incredible support of striking workers at Coke. You have shown Coke and the community at large that you are willing to fight for what is right.