

# Labor Storm

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# Introduction

This is the second edition of the semiannual labor journal *Labor Storm*. Our readers will note a few changes from the first edition.

The most major change is the removal of the international section. We would like to begin selling *Labor Storm* and other materials, in collaboration with New Labor Press and others, in order to raise money for a strike and legal defense fund for workers in the US. Since we do not have the means to send remittances to international contributors, and have no interest in profiting off the work of labor journalists from other countries, we have simply decided to remove the international section altogether. If we are able to work out a system for republishing articles from foreign labor organizations in the future, we may bring this section back.

Instead of the international correspondence, we have included reports on local conditions from the New Labor Committees, which have been established and sunk roots practically since our last editions. These are focused mainly on the specifics of the local economy and labor organizations that these workers' circles are active in. This will provide greater focus for the activity of the workers' circles, provide important background information for organizers in the area, and improve our understanding of the subjective aspect of the labor movement. Because of these additional organizations, this second edition is much larger than our first edition.

Also of note is the fact that *Barista's Voice* does not have a report published here, and instead the Starbucks section can be found under the Organization of Class-conscious

Service Workers section. This is because *BV* has been folded into the Organization of Class-conscious Service Workers. This was due to a mixture of repression against organizers by reactionary forces at Starbucks, resulting in the firing of one key organizer, failures of the *BV* secretary such as lack of reporting and lack of collective discipline, and NLOC national political-organizational issues which have been in part rectified with an expanded national leadership and our new program.

The newly-founded shop organization at the United States Postal Service (USPS), *New Day at USPS*, also does not have a report published here. This is simply because of the timing of their affiliation to the NLOC. They will have a thorough report in the next edition of *Labor Storm*.

Lastly, a comment on the state of the American labor movement over the last six months is in order. In a short period, the Trump administration has unilaterally shredded a number of important state union contracts and slowed the already-dysfunctional government labor bodies to a halt. This has happened alongside the most shameless capitulation on the part of the “labor leaders” to Trump, with unions like the Teamsters and UAW—the supposed militant, progressive wing of the labor movement—actively promoting Trump’s agenda. This is not a surprise to anyone familiar with the state unions’ conduct in the COVID crisis during Trump’s first term, but that makes it no less treacherous. In between the increasingly fascist-collaborator state unions and the class-conscious independent labor movement led by the NLOC, there exists a large number of revisionist non-governmental organization and university “labor experts” scratching their heads over the crisis that their politics have led the labor movement into. It scarcely needs explaining that

now, more than ever, is the time to make a decisive break with state unionism.

In addition to these internal developments, American imperialism has been hitting out wildly in every direction on the international stage: the use of tariffs as a means of extortion, completely unjustifiable use of force against random civilian vessels in South America, etc. Most notable is the escalation of the genocide of the Palestinian people, now being carried out cynically under the guise of a “peace agreement” established by the Zionists. More and more workers are seeing the connection between their own oppression at home and the criminal activities of the Zionists in Palestine. There have been numerous strikes against Zionism in multiple countries. In the US, the state unions are avid supporters of Zionism, and since state unionism is the main trend in the American labor movement, “anti-Zionism” has been mainly limited to offering pointless resolutions to these same Zionist unions. The genuinely anti-imperialist workers cannot fail to see that in the US, the labor movement cannot deal a decisive blow against Zionism without overthrowing the state unions, who assist the Zionist bandits and work to drum up support for American imperialism among the workers.

In order to keep up with these developments, the NLOC is constantly working to produce trade union literature, among other organizing tasks. Internally, the NLOC is working to improve our reporting mechanisms and formalize the rights and responsibilities of our activists at all levels, which will be summarized in the form of a constitution in the near future. Additionally, the shop organizations are establishing platforms to guide the struggle in specific firms and industries under the Trump regime, as well as establishing industrial unity committees

in order to unite the broadest masses to fight for their own political and economic demands against the fascist offensive.

In short, independent labor organizing is only going to become a more urgent need in 2026. The government is doing everything possible to liquidate existing concessions to the working class, and the state unions are either passively accepting it or actively assisting in this task. The state unions are simply incapable of resolving any of the basic grievances the American workers have. There are colossal struggles ahead between American imperialism on the one hand and the workers and oppressed nations on the other, and the working class cannot win them if they are not united.

*(Cover photo: pro-Palestine dockworkers strike in Italy, 2025)*

# New Day at Amazon

## Objective Factors

Amazon is an international logistics monopoly and online retailer. Amazon employs 1.55 million workers, and in 2024 Amazon's volume reached 6.1 to 6.3 billion parcels. Amazon controls around 25-28% of the share of the parcel delivery market. They also control 37.8% of the US eCommerce market share. This shows an uptick in both workforce and in market size/share. Amazon has been investing in the upgrading of machinery nationwide. They have been mainly introducing automated sorting at Delivery Stations and continued upgrading robotics in Fulfillment Centers. They recently let go of about 14,000 corporate workers as they are introducing AI systems.

Over the past couple of years, Amazon has been consolidating its shops, canceling plans to open more and closing dozens around the country. Now that they have been able to fix their overbuilding during the pandemic, they have been focusing on rural and same-day nodes. Within the next couple of years, they will be building mainly rural delivery stations, some new Fulfillment Centers and Sort Centers.

The company usually maintains buildings relatively well. Their warehouses are usually rented. Equipment used includes belt machinery, trucks, jacks, forklifts, and many smaller items like tape, boxes, and paper. They completely rent and hire their delivery trucks and employees through third-party companies that compete for contracts. The company provides everything. They provide our steel toed

shoes, our box cutters, vests, hard hats, markers, etc. It is currently quite easy for Amazon to hire new employees.

The wages at Amazon are either above the industry standard or average. \$22.50/hr is about the median wage nation wide. Wages over the last year (\$22/hr in 2024) are practically stagnant while insurance continues to rise. The job classifications are as follows: T1, T3, L4, L5, up to L12 (Jeff Bezos). Tiered employees are hourly and Level employees are salaried. T1s are the basic package handlers. Notice there is no T2 to put a clear difference between employees and management. T3 is a process assistant and has all the powers of a manager except discipline. L4 and up are all salaried and are managers with full power. Each promotion comes with significant raises and benefits. People are supposed to work 40 hours a week but Amazon does their best to cut down on labor costs using Voluntary Time Off. When we are above headcount and they don't need all of us, they send us home without pay on a voluntary basis. Voluntary time off is always fully taken up when available. Schedules depend on your building type. Some work four 10s, some three 12s, others five 7s, some are "flex" and pick up hours whenever they are available no matter how long or short.

Realized surplus value = \$76.19B (note that this operating income nearly doubled from 2023 to 2024 and as of 2025 Q3 is about \$8B more than 2024)

Variable capital = estimated \$72.54B (1.55 M workers x 52 weeks x 40hrs a week x \$22.5hr)

Rate of exploitation = 105.03% (this amounts for an almost 11% increase from last year!)

Although Amazon is suing the Federal government over the legality of the NLRB, they have also started suing state governments to *enforce* the NLRB. The state of New York recently passed a law allowing their government to intervene in private sector labor relations. Amazon is suing against this saying the NLRB should control things. So on one hand, Amazon thinks the NLRB is unconstitutional. On the other, they uphold it so that they can halt any attempt at labor organizing. This is blatant hypocrisy.

Amazon has three main types of shops: Fulfillment Centers (FC), Delivery Stations (DS), and Sort Centers (SC). They also have important types of shops that are not as frequently built including Receive Centers, Air Hubs, and specialty shops like Amazon Fresh and XL warehouses. Amazon tries to cross-train workers wherever possible. Amazon uses and abuses the worker to the extreme and then throws them out when they feel like it. The division of labor depends heavily on the type of building. For example, at a DS basically everyone can do everything. On the other hand, at a FC you are stuck doing the same thing for months on end.

Amazon workers are majority male. In some metropolitan areas, there tend to be significant immigrant populations that make up the workforce. Almost all immigrants at Amazon have current documents as you need to have a visa or be a citizen to work at Amazon. Across the country the major demographics that work at Amazon are as follows: Black and white workers each make up about 30% respectively, Latino workers make up around 25%, Asian workers around 14%, around 5-6% are indigenous or other.

Labor and management are in direct conflict everyday. The public rumors about how we are worked are absolutely true. We are worked as hard as possible and management walks around with their hands in their pockets, on their laptops, barking orders or disciplining us. Equipment isn't necessarily abused as much as quantity is 100% placed over quality at all times. Amazon has to toe the line between keeping us "safe" for insurance reasons and pushing us and the machinery to the limit. Managers are trained but remain largely incompetent since most managers are hired directly out of college. They have no experience as warehouse workers and usually take months to years to understand the process and become capable of overseeing an operation without just making the numbers look good.

## **Subjective Factor**

Obstacles to organizing Amazon include the mass surveillance within our workplaces, the vast amount of resources that the company holds relative to us, and how tired people get after a long day of work (especially those with families), making them lethargic and apathetic. This overwork and constant surveillance thus has a political purpose as well: because while it worsens conditions it also attacks at workers' ability to collectively organize against the daily abuses on the floor.

The main mistaken idea among Amazon workers is national chauvinism and racism of all stripes. Because of the density of immigrants in our shops, and the fact that no real perspective besides management's is spread to the workers, American workers fall into reaction and blame the immigrants for many of the issues at the shop. In

reality, almost nothing is their fault and they and the native-born Amazon workers are of one class: the working-class. At this point minorities/migrants and women have been the best supporters and members of the organization. No one has taken up the slogan “it is right to rebel” like these two groups. White workers and men are the hardest to organize because of their national and/or male chauvinism.

Recently, the Teamsters again attempted to organize workers at a Delivery Station in Queens, New York (DBK4). A Delivery Station Provider (DSP)—a company that has a contract with Amazon to make daily deliveries—was “unionized” by the Teamsters but suddenly had their contract terminated. While it is not uncommon for DSP contracts to be terminated and work shifted around, Amazon has a track record of terminating Teamster “unionized” DSP contracts. Teamsters gave up the fight pretty quickly and shrugged their shoulders when this happened. It is typical practice for Teamsters to wash their hands of such fights quickly, and simply get those terminated workers jobs at an already IBT-organized firm.

The Teamsters have a narrow trade union mindset. They have only been “unionizing” certain portions of Amazon warehouses in hopes to legally force Amazon to recognize Teamsters as the sole union in charge of all Amazon workers.

We have seen Amazon continuously fire migrant workers, especially those on the now-ended TPS (Temporary Protective Status). The immigrant workers however still face heavy burdens from management when it comes to workload. Our main objective as a shop organization this

year will be to fully integrate the migrant struggle at Amazon with the union struggle.

## **NLOC Organizing**

We are still operating with an Executive Committee. At this time the Executive Committee is formally responsible for just one shop, but it is starting to oversee expansion into other shops. Our goal is to have 4-5 shops organized by the end of 2026. We have mainly had campaigns around protecting our migrant coworkers. These campaigns saw little to no success in terms of getting management to concede to demands, but did result in some incorporation of migrant workers into our support base. Our main thing stopping us is absolute exhaustion and conflicting shift timing. The goal is for these to be overcome with a better-developed committee system, and a wider delegation of tasks among supporters and contacts of our organization, both inside and outside Amazon itself, to better shoulder the burden of union organizing as a collective.

Recently we have been organizing and systematizing our first draft of our demands. While these are very much up for change, criticism, and suggestion, we feel strongly about the following minimum demands:

- 1) \$30/hr starting wage
  - a) Third shift is paid at overtime rate.
  - b) Weekend shifts are paid with a \$5 premium.
- 2) Start the year out with 160 hours of PTO. UPT needs to be down to the minute.
- 3) End to all tracking and surveillance of employees.
- 4) Special demands for migrant workers:

- a) Any work missed for meetings/appointments with immigration or legal council should be 100% paid for.
  - b) Legal services should be provided for free.
  - c) On-demand translation should be provided in the warehouse 24/7.
  - d) Against document checks and harassment/discrimination based on immigration status
- 5) Employee insurance plan should have a premium covered 100% by the employers. Childcare to be covered 100% as well.
  - 6) Employees with 3+ years should be provided with sufficient retirement, paid for by Amazon.
  - 7) All employees start out as blue badge. White badges should be abolished.
  - 8) Establishment of a joint committee composed of half employee representatives, half corporate representatives for resolving grievances involving management. Representatives made up of at both men and women, along different prominent social groups (ex: migrant from a certain nation).
  - 9) Anything past 8 hours in one day is paid at overtime rate.
  - 10) Hazard pay for extreme weather, including extreme winds, snowfall, rainfall, exposure to temperatures above 85°F or below freezing.
  - 11) Minimum of two consecutive scheduled days off per week, no mandatory overtime.
  - 12) Minimum turnaround time of 12 hours between shifts.
  - 13) Sufficient paid breaks, determined by the workers themselves.
  - 14) Full payment of Career Choice programs.

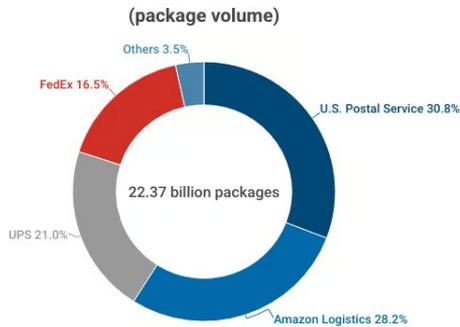
# New Day at UPS

## Objective Factors

United Parcel Service employs approximately 490,000 workers internationally. UPS services roughly 16.5 million parcels daily in its U.S. domestic operations. UPS has been upgrading its buildings and equipment recently as part of its “Network Reimagined” initiative in 2025—however, it is currently unknown what proportion of volume is processed in these new buildings and how much is still processed in pre-2023 operations. UPS described the adjustments in 2025 thusly: “We expect to reduce our operational workforce by approximately 20,000 positions during 2025. We closed daily operations at 74 leased and owned buildings by June 30. We continue to review expected changes in volume in our integrated air and ground network to identify additional buildings for closure. We anticipate \$3.5 billion of total cost savings will be achieved from Network Reconfiguration and Efficiency Reimagined in 2025.” UPS tries to run old buildings and equipment as long as physically possible because they own the land and buildings and therefore want to squeeze every cent possible out of them.

UPS has slightly declined in domestic volume in 2025—16.5m for 2025Q2 down from 17.8 2024Q2—and in fact it seems as though Amazon has already or will soon surpass UPS as the largest private-sector parcel shipper in the US.

## Amazon Logistics U.S. Market Share



Source: Pitney Bowes Shipping Index

UPS reported an operating margin of 6.5% for the US domestic segment, which is down from 7% last year, and compares to 15% for international operations, also down from 16.5% last year. This clearly illustrates two phenomena: 1. the declining rate of profit at UPS, which is being exacerbated by its drive to cut labor costs through improvements in the productive forces, and 2. American workers in the UPS system are exploited at a lower rate than other countries—whether this is deliberate on UPS’ part to maintain a docile workforce in the country where most of their volume is handled, or an accidental feature of the Teamsters’ collective bargaining agreements (which only cover the US and Canada) is unclear. In any case, the realized rate of profit at UPS domestically is only a mere 6.5%, and will only continue to decrease unless there is a major negative change to the pay structure in their domestic operations. This is unlikely to happen without a major political shift in the logistics industry—such as the complete liquidation of existing CBAs or some other huge change to the labor market—as the bulk of employees are already at or near market rate.

Part-time employees are hired at \$21/hour with 50 cent/year raises for the first four years as specified by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters' collective bargaining agreement. This is virtually identical (depending on location and job) to the unorganized Amazon warehouse employees. This fact combined with the extraordinarily harsh treatment of employees and poor conditions in the warehouses makes it difficult for UPS to maintain adequate levels of staffing, which are deliberately kept low in order to pressure employees into raising their packages per hour. Part-time employees make up the majority of employees, however, full-time pay progression is much higher, beginning at \$23/hour and increasing by multiple dollars each year. Full-time bids are kept in short supply thanks to the Teamsters' agreement with UPS and it is unknown how many full-time employees actually make it to the end of progression, as there are reports of high turnover among the drivers who make up the majority of full-time employees.

As pointed out in *New Day at UPS*, the regulatory agencies have been effectively controlled by UPS directly ever since David Keeling, an ex-UPS and Amazon manager, was put in charge of OSHA. Not coincidentally, there have been no major changes to UPS' compliance. The most recent OSHA violation with a cash penalty seems to be from 2023, before Keeling took over. (UPS was fined \$85k for repeatedly not maintaining egress to OSHA specifications.) The failure to regulate safety standards at UPS resulted in the recent death of a UPSer in California who was crushed by packages in the back of a UPS trailer, covered in detail in *New Day at UPS* #35, as well as the major aviation accident at Worldport in early November.

Division of labor inside the company is virtually unchanged since the previous *Labor Storm*. The large number of immigrant employees, especially from Haiti, in the WORMA operation continue to play an outsized role in production, as they are given the toughest loads and frequently seek overtime to make up for their poor pay. It is worth noting that the increasing number of women, disabled people, immigrants, and non-white workers handle much more volume compared to a decade ago, when the operation was still mostly middle-aged white men. This change in demographics has not only NOT been accompanied by a change in the line of the Teamsters, but the Teamsters seem more determined than ever to smear them in the press, with General President Sean O'Brien even starting a podcast where he joins with Republicans in whining about "woke".

Conflicts between labor and management have worsened in recent months as the collective bargaining agreement has totally broken down and managers quit or were replaced with incompetent new employees. Violations of the collective bargaining agreement as well as safety regulations are commonplace, with one employee in WORMA suffering a severe concussion after a feeder pulled off with this employee in the back of the truck.

## **Subjective Factor**

Relations between UPS management and UPS hourly, and between the IBT and the UPSers, have only deteriorated alongside working conditions. The grievance system, which was already restricted to a minority of UPSers who used it for a little extra money, has broken down even more, as UPS has simply refused to hold panel

hearings and diminished the amount of money paid out in grievances. Actually, there is a significant backlog of grievance panel hearings going back several months. In the meantime, UPS simply continues breaking the contract. The Teamsters have taken to simply “settling” with the company, letting them unilaterally revise the collective bargaining agreement so long as it is formally kept in place, allowing the Teamsters to continue collecting dues off of a practically null agreement. UPS’ internal discipline system has been marshaled to this end, with WORMA full-timers being coerced into violating their own collective bargaining agreement, as documented in the August and September editions of *New Day at UPS*.

This has resulted in the near-total withdrawal of the UPSers from the labor movement. Having suffered a “historic victory” in 2023 that resulted in layoffs and below-market wages, the UPSers are essentially split into two camps: the long-term employees who are trying to “lay low” and hold onto what minor concessions they currently possess by acquiescing to whatever UPS asks, and the short-term part-time employees (the majority) who have no concept of labor organizing or the unique difficulties of organizing at UPS.

Grievances have remained virtually unchanged since the passage of the 2023 contract. Here is how *New Day at UPS* summarized them in the August 2025 edition: “National layoffs, successful reduction of headcount through automation and transfer of work away from old buildings with full-timers/seniority workers and towards new automated buildings staffed by part-timers; forced OT for some, lack of OT for others; inconsistent scheduling in general not aligned with the procedures laid out in the collective bargaining agreement; lack of full-time jobs for

part-timers who want them, no clear path to full-time employment; ridiculous four-year wage progression with almost all the raises at the very end for those who are able to find full-time employment; supervisors stealing bargaining unit work; harassment over work rates/random contract procedures UPS takes issue with, including inside workers not punching out for lunch per the New England supplement; seniority violations (including in distribution of OT, cutting hourlies, preferred work); lack of climate control, particularly extreme heat for drivers in the South, but really all UPSers are subject to extreme heat and humidity in the summer and extreme cold and unsafe driving conditions in the winter; lack of break periods (varies wildly throughout the country, but everywhere UPS is constantly pressuring people to work through them); constant speedups, which creates huge safety issues, particularly overheating motors/ripping belts and lack of egress; jobs which are safety-focused (for instance, hazmat responders who clean up spills) are constantly cut or see their hours reduced as part of UPS' cost-cutting drive.”

Politically, the UPSers are largely intermediate, containing an eclectic mix of correct and incorrect ideas. However, because of the influence of the capitalists and their organizations like the IBT, and the weakness of the class-conscious workers organizations like *New Day at UPS*, most UPSers currently have a very limited and backwards relationship to trade union organizing. The rank-and-file is largely individualistic and liberal, which is not conducive to labor organizing. However, the Teamsters' support for the Trump administration and the overtly repressive actions of the latter are rapidly destroying illusions in liberal democracy and turning the workers away from the

reactionary trends in the labor movement. Especially important on this front is the collapse of support for Teamsters for a Democratic Union, whose supporters have been forced to shamefacedly hide behind other organizations like Teamsters Mobilize or the various Trotskyite sects active in the IBT, who remain marginalized with low levels of activity.

## **NLOC Organizing**

New Day at UPS organizing over the last six months has experienced a number of difficulties, mainly stemming from layoffs and the termination of temporary employees. This period has been characterized by New Day putting forward a number of proposals to the rank and file, none of which were successful in gathering significant support. This is partially due to UPS' labor-management methods, which rely on divide-and-conquer, frequently targeting one job class while relaxing their grip on others. This has a twofold effect in diffusing the rebelliousness of the rank-and-file: on the one hand, the people who are targeted by UPS adopt a "wait and see" attitude with the not-unreasonable expectation that UPS will move on in short order with no serious penalty for them, and on the other hand, the people who are not being targeted see no reason to stick their necks out for their coworkers. This is made drastically worse by the Teamsters, who dogmatically assert all problems can and must be resolved through the grievance process, in spite of the fact that the grievance panels literally do not function at the moment. As noted above, there are major factors driving the UPSers towards the NLOC line, it is simply a question of how to consolidate the workers spontaneously moving towards New Day at UPS. New Day at UPS distributed

approximately 150 copies of the newsletter at WORMA over the last six months. One thing that *New Day at UPS* has consistently struggled with is training up new activists: supporters are either reluctant to accept new organizing responsibilities or accept them in words without any follow-up. We hope to overcome this issue by establishing lower-level bodies for resolving specific grievances (specifically a Women’s Grievance Committee) and by being more open in certain activities in the hub, such as hosting a cook-out or some other event that goes against the conspiratorial-style organizing that has unfortunately been normalized at UPS by the Teamster gangsters and their Trotskyite lackeys.

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# Organization of Class-Conscious Service Workers (OCSW)

## Compass Group

### Objective Factors

As stated in *Labor Storm #1*, Compass Group is a multinational corporation that employs approximately 580,000 people worldwide at around 4,500 locations. While two-thirds of the locations are in the US, US residents only account for about half of the total employees. This year, Compass Group reported to no longer be operating in a few third-world countries such as Kazakhstan and Mexico, but have asserted more efforts in the UK, Ireland, and Germany. Compass Group estimates that the global “addressable market” in food service is worth about \$302B, and report that they control under 15% of it.

The conditions haven’t changed much at the Eurest cafeteria being organized by OSCW. It is open Monday-Friday, with 2 stations open for Breakfast and between 4-6 stations open for Lunch. Workers in the cafeteria are also responsible for providing food and customer service for catering events that go on throughout the day. On busy days of the week the cafeteria processes over 1k orders, but on Fridays it could get as low as only a few hundred. The biggest change is that the number of employees has gone down over the last six months, now with only around

15 non-manager staff working on a normal day, including the cooks, marketplace staff, and catering runners.

The large-equipment in the kitchen has stayed the same: 6 ovens; 1 brick oven; 3 stovetops; 2 grills; 8 fridges; 2 walk-ins (1 fridge, 1 freezer); 1 ice machine; 1 fryer; 5 sandwich presses; 2 stand-mixers; 2 sets of coffee carafes; 1 industrial dishwasher. The equipment in the kitchen is provided by the owner of the building to the company that they contract, so Eurest does not own the equipment. Equipment is very old, but doesn't usually break down except for the dishwasher. The ice machine has also briefly stopped working in the last six months.

The coffee bar at this location is open from 7-4 everyday except Friday when it closes at 2. There are only 2 non-manager staff, and one incompetent "supervisor" who was apparently hired to do administrative work. We serve 400-500 people most days, sales are usually around \$2000 Monday-Thursday, sometimes up to \$2500, and around \$1000 on Fridays. The coffee bar uses four 4-liter coffee brewers, 2 Verismo espresso machines, a large confectioner's oven, a blender, a small dishwasher, and an ice machine. We also have one large and two smaller fridges, plus two display cases with lighting and refrigeration. The building similarly owns the coffee bar equipment, which is old and often breaks down, particularly the espresso machines and coffee carafes. Hiring new workers is more difficult than at other restaurants due to the extensive security protocols needed in order to work at the Citizens Bank. However, this doesn't stop management from utilizing "insta-workers" through gig apps in order to fill shifts. There seem to be limitations on what insta-workers can do because of these security protocols; apparently they aren't supposed to

walk around the building unsupervised, so they can't do catering.

In 2024, Compass Group reports \$42.002B revenue and an "operating profit" of \$2.584B. As was previously determined in Labor Storm #1, the rate of profit for Compass Group is just under 7%, which is slightly higher than the average of restaurants, usually 4-5%. The rate of exploitation has gone up to 15.6% since Labor Storm #1, due to a number of employees quitting.

## **Subjective Factor**

Every worker has been having problems with management since April when there was huge turnover. We lost around 10 people at this one location since the new general manager (GM) started.

Most workers are not directly hostile towards management, but there are many instances of workers losing patience and getting into arguments with managers or blowing up at them. Management pretends to not be hostile towards employees, but they often yell and berate workers. They half-monitor employees, the majority of issues are ignored, but when it comes to specific employees that they don't like or things they believe are more important, they make it a big problem.

The GM has had a racist attitude and engages in reactionary behavior. She basically targeted one of the baristas and her boyfriend who worked in the kitchen; both of them were Black and felt, along with others who witnessed the behavior, that the GM was holding them to standards and expecting extra work that wasn't expected from the white employees in the same positions. She

apparently allowed customers to be racist towards one of the catering workers, saying “you’re a big girl, you can take a joke.” She has also been pronouncing the name of one of the Black insta-workers wrong in a really blatant way.

It should also be noted there are significant pay differences among the employees. For example, the main OCSW organizer at this location makes \$19 an hour at the coffee bar, and the other non-manager is paid \$26 due to being cross-trained and favoritism from management. One person in catering makes \$21, one cook who has been there awhile makes \$23. The part-time dishwasher is paid only \$16 an hour, the lowest in the kitchen.

There is a human resources department for Compass Group. At the advice of his coworkers, an OCSW supporter filed a complaint through HR soon after the current GM started in April, when she was trying to pressure the organizer to remove his mask by threatening to move him to a different position if he wanted to keep wearing one. The number was not readily available, and while it seems the GM was told to back down by her higher-ups, HR never followed up with details after they closed the case.

The use of “insta-workers” and gig apps has only gotten more frequent, for many months it was used in place of hiring anyone. Now there is only one consistent insta-worker, but they haven’t fixed the staffing problems so there are almost always only 2 people at coffee bar. The rest of the place is similarly understaffed, but the coffee bar happens to feel it most sharply because of how busy we get. The staffing is the most immediate demand that people have, many other demands have rarely been

brought up since the conditions have gotten so bad in regards to staffing. The wages are also vary widely between employees so there is the demand to have wages be more fair.

The majority of workers are not politically active, and many of the pro-union people that the Euresst organizer was closer with ended up leaving the job. There is still a worker who reports that, before the OCSW contact came in, he tried to convince the other coworkers to unionize, and in one instance to do some sort of work stoppage. His stated reason for lack of success is that many people who work here have been here for years and are very comfortable waiting for retirement, so they don't want to stir the pot.

## **Starbucks**

### **Objective Factors**

Starbucks has approximately 211,000 employees in the US and 361,000 globally. The company opened 308 net new stores in Q3, ending the period with 41,097 stores: 53% company-operated and 47% licensed. At the end of Q3, stores in the U.S. and China comprised 61% of the company's global portfolio, with 17,230 and 7,828 stores in the U.S. and China, respectively. For company stores, the equipment is owned directly by the company, it is common for things to break. Tech issues are also common. Broken equipment is generally replaced quickly.

Operating margins for the last five years are 13.8%, compared to restaurant industry average of 15.8% and

service sector average of 14.4%. Starbucks share of the restaurant market is estimated by CSI Market to be 29%.

The company generally doesn't have trouble finding new employees, but they are downsizing. Total number of Starbucks employees in 2024 was 361,000, a 5.25% decline from 2023. Total number of Starbucks employees in 2023 was 381,000, a 5.22% decline from 2022. Starbucks recently announced that they'll be closing over 400 locations, around 1% of stores, laying off over 900 employees. The announcement happened about a week before the closures were set to happen. Q3 global sales are down 2%.

Average wage at Starbucks is \$15.58, compared to the average wage for baristas of \$14.29 per hour. The rate of exploitation is 76% based off of the following calculations: assuming the average Starbucks worker works 30 hours a week (due to most workers not being full time) at an average wage of \$15.58 an hour and 50 weeks out of the year (to account for sick time and vacations) to get an average yearly wage of 23,370, then multiplied this average wage by 211,000 workers in the US gets a domestic wage bill of \$4,931,070,000. The 2024 earnings report claims a domestic net income of 3,760,900,000. Dividing the net income (as a rough substitute for surplus value) by the variable capital gives us .762 or a rate of exploitation of 76%.

The NLRB has allowed "Unfair Labor Practice" (ULP) strikes by Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) and the company has been sued for ULP violations as well. Starbucks' political contributions were \$466,953 and Starbucks spent \$1,540,000 on lobbying in 2024. Their contributions are overwhelmingly to Democrats.

Within the company, all baristas are trained to work at every station, and shift supervisors assign positions to baristas and move them according to their preference. The different positions are: front and food (ovens and taking cafe orders), DTO (taking drive-through orders), DTR (handling transactions at drive-through—although drive-through is sometimes just one person, especially outside of peak hours), drive-through bar (making drinks for drive through), cafe mobile bar (making drinks for cafe and mobile/delivery drinks), and customer support (restocking and helping with miscellaneous tasks).

At the location the OCSW is organizing, a lot of workers have been there for a couple years. Employees are mainly white, and there are more women and non-binary people than men. There are many LGBTQ workers at Starbucks in general. There are not a lot of migrant workers.

Median wage is around \$16. Wages increase with seniority and some veteran baristas make over \$17. Shift supervisors usually start at around \$21 and can go up to the high 20s. Wages are market standard. Most baristas are part-time, but usually still over 20 hours a week (the minimum required for benefits). Shift supervisors and the best baristas work closer to full-time, high 30s if not 40 hours a week. Store managers are given a total amount of hours for a week to spread around their employees, and shifts are often understaffed because of the limitations of this “budget”. Shift supervisors are generally competent, since they work on the floor with the regular baristas. Store managers are typically incompetent at working on the floor, but perform their role within the company well.

## Subjective Factor

There are many women and LGBT workers at Starbucks who have expressed interest in struggling to expand their rights. However, labor organizing at one location led by a transgender woman was fully liquidated thanks to a transphobic campaign by reactionary Starbucks workers that was tacitly supported by management.

As for SBWU, they are still trying to get a first contract, and have already agreed to a no-strike clause. SBWU operates by assigning a union staffer to each prospective store to give guidance to the store's organizing committee. These committees are made up of a few workers, usually including shift leads, and are responsible for convincing workers to vote yes in a union certification vote. In the run up to the November strike, unionized stores began electing strike captains, who would be the ones tasked with actually mobilizing their co workers to take part in the strike. These strike captain elections only took place beginning at the end of August, leaving a mere two and a half months for the few strike captains in every store to actually convince their co workers to go on strike, this lack of real preparation time has been a major factor in the poor performance of the strike.

There are two fundamental issues with SBWU's strike strategy, first is the limited time frame of the strike, and the second is the small number of active union stores capable of going on strike.

The root of the first issue is that SBWU informed the strike captains that the strike was only going to last 6 weeks maximum, this is all that was planned for, even if publicly SBWU calls it indefinite. Undoubtedly, the

company is aware of this set time frame, and has set aside the capital that it thinks is necessary to weather the 6 weeks, and with the sale of the majority ownership of its Chinese stores for \$4 billion, the company is not short of fresh capital.

The second major issue is the fact that so few of the over 17,000 stores in the US are actually on strike. Only 550 stores out of this over 17,000 are unionized, with far less actually even taking part in the full 6 week strike, with many stores only joining for the last 3 weeks, or even just the last week. Only 65 stores and 1,000 workers actually began the strike on November 13<sup>th</sup>. This speaks to the real strike strategy of SBWU and SEIU, their strategy is to create media attention around the strikes to attempt to hurt Starbucks' public image in order to scare investors, and it is not meant to meaningfully stop production through the mobilization of as many workers as possible.

This ongoing strike is what SBWU has been preparing for all year, it has been described to the NLOC activists involved as "all or nothing". SBWU has bet its life on the success of this strike, but the numbers don't lie, they have thus far failed to meaningfully impact Starbucks. If there is to be a contract, as was said, it will prevent union workers from striking; it will be a sellout contract that Starbucks workers grow to resent.

# **The Bazaar by Jose Andres (Think Food Group restaurant)**

## **Objective Factors**

In the Bazaar, there are at least 80-120 employees working in the whole restaurant. Specific revenue gains are not publicly available as this is considered proprietary information. It is a large enterprise and sees anywhere between 150-200 guests Friday-Saturday and 80 the rest of the week. This is considered a low volume, as the season is very slow in Washington, D.C. We used to see anywhere from 300-400 guests every Friday-Saturday. The Bazaar is unique as it is only one of two Bazaar locations which exist under the Jose Andres Group (JAG), which owns at least 40 restaurants in the entire country, giving it a high status position within the company.

Ownership of tools used to make, serve, and prepare dishes is shared between the company and employees. Tools such as knives and torches are expected to come from the employees. Other kitchen tools and trays are provided by the company. Equipment like industrial stoves and dish pit washing machines are owned by the hotel which comes with the space rented to the company. The company rents its space from a third party through the contract JAG has through the Hilton Hotel Company. Personal equipment tends to be relatively well-kept, especially personal knives used in the kitchen. Industrial equipment which is rented through the hotel shows signs of wear and tear and tends to break down.

JAG owns about 40 fine-dining restaurants in the United States and other countries. While JAG's presence in the overall restaurant industry is small compared to monopoly fast food and retail chains (if they are being included as part of the same sector/market), the company still has a strong hold over the local market in Washington, D.C. Jose Andres had his start in the D.C. area with a flagship restaurant called Jaleo. His local kingdom grew from this one shop, and the company now owns about 10 high-end restaurants in the city. Exact figures are unknown, but this is a significant number of high-end restaurants in an otherwise fragmented sector of the food service industry.

Compared to other restaurants, the Bazaar has no problem hiring new people, especially in this period of high labor density and low job opportunities. Unlike other firms, the Bazaar pays anywhere from to \$22-25 per hour for workers in the kitchen, \$18 for those in the dish pit, and \$18-22 for those who work at the host stand.

Wages in the restaurant industry are not typically based on the minimum wages set by the state but rather on the skill of the individual worker and how well the business is doing, which is determined by the chefs who are the managers of the kitchen. This is typical for kitchen workers. As for tipped workers, pay depends on volume of guests and amounts of tips. A "good job" is any position where the amount of tips expected in a night is relatively high. In DC, the minimum wage for tipped workers is \$10/hr but wages tend to be higher than this with tips. Based on this information, for bussers, who are the

lowest in the ranks of tipped workers, pay can be anywhere between \$20-22 per hour, for food runners pay can be between \$23-25 per hour, and servers/bartenders, who get the most amount of tips, pay can be anywhere between \$25-30 an hour. Of course, this depends on how well the restaurant relative to overall market conditions. If business is slow, everyone's tipped wages plummet, especially bussers and food runners. Compared to other restaurants of its type, wages at the Bazaar are about the same or slightly better, especially for servers and bartenders.

Jose Andres served in the Biden administration as the co-chair of the president's council on sports, fitness, and nutrition from March 2022-January 2025 (one week before Trump was sworn in). He also runs World Central Kitchen, a non-profit which he founded in 2010. As such, linked very closely to the bourgeois state in general, serving as an auxiliary supporter and ally for the Democratic Party. This has paid off materially for the Bazaar. During the Biden administration, many high-profile Democrats would frequent the restaurant, and it was not uncommon to see Nancy Pelosi or Sonia Sotomayor on a daily basis.

In the Bazaar, division of labor is divided into two categories: Front of House (positions which are guest-facing, "FOH") and Back of House (positions which are not guest-facing, "BOH"). FOH positions can be divided generally into two types: support staff (hosts who sit guests, bussers who clean tables, and food runners who bring food) and service staff (servers and bartenders who sell food/drinks and provide the overall

service experience at the restaurant). At the Bazaar, food runners have a unique position, as they also contribute to the overall experience of guests in the same way that servers and bartenders do. They have to do three basic things: explain the dish, what it's made of, and how to eat it. This means that unlike many other restaurants, food runners must know how to speak basic English. For BOH, there two more types: support staff, meaning prep cooks who prepare ingredients, good receivers who deliver goods, and dishwashers who clean dishes for both FOH and BOH; and kitchen staff, meaning line cooks who do the main work of cooking dishes and are divided into positions based on what type of kitchen stations they run.

Generally speaking, almost all BOH and support staff (except food runners who are 50-50%) are Spanish speakers; these workers compromise 80% of the total employees. Their national origins are extremely diverse: Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, and Columbia to name a few. Central Americans have a slight edge at ~40%, but overall, there is no one Latin American country that predominates.

As for workers in the main FOH staff positions (servers, bartenders, hosts), most are born in the United States, though ethnically diverse, and speak English. Demographically, no one group dominates. The main division at work is along linguistic lines (i.e., English vs non-English speaking) and between FOH support and main staff (physical vs mental labor). Gender is another dividing line. Work among FOH support staff is often divided by gender as

men are assigned to do the physically demanding work, while in BOH hot line all workers are men who hold, to various degrees, male chauvinistic views.

There is typically conflict between workers and managers over hours, especially by workers who are younger and lower on the seniority list. FOH, typically work anywhere between 25-30 hours in a week. For BOH, hours tend to be closer to at least 30 hours. This is mainly for employees who are at the top of the seniority list and can work their full 5 days. A good percentage of workers (40%) work 25-30 hours, due to being lower on the seniority list, and work other jobs. All employees have seen a reduction of hours, due to the lower density of business currently affecting the restaurant due to the depressed market. Schedules for FOH are decided by the manager in charge of their position and released every Thursday. For BOH, sous-chefs have the main responsibility.

There are significant wage differences among employees who work in the kitchen; these range anywhere from \$21-25 per hour based on “experience and time within the position.” This is mainly because wages are negotiated during the interview process for most BOH line workers, which is based on experience and time worked in a position and perceived friendliness/loyalty to the chef. This also applies to other positions such as hosts and dishwashers. Wages are not negotiated and are fixed at the D.C. standard of 10 an hour. According to our union contract, the company is mandated to match pay increases initially passed by the D.C. Council called “Initiative 82,” which intends to gradually raise the minimum

wage for tipped employees to the current minimum wage (\$18 per hour) by 2028, even if D.C. Council were to ever go back on this decision. However, when the D.C. Council voted to rescind this initiative in late July of this year, JAG followed suit and paused the scheduled wage raise for tipped employees under the guise of “following the new D.C. law,” and the supposed “the current low density of business facing the restaurant.”

Workers are surveilled primarily by cameras around the restaurant, storage, and in spaces shared with the hotel. These are mainly used by management.

The state of equipment rented through the space of the hotel is quite old and constantly breaks down. This is especially true of sinks, industrial dish washers, and the constant leaking of water from the roofs in the dish washing and kitchen areas. These areas tend to be very slippery due to all the water, and they are a major cause of anxiety among the bussers since they have to be careful whenever they walk around these very wet areas.

Another major issue plaguing the restaurant is the constant threat of major layoffs because of slow business. Lunch services have been closed since late August, leading to the AM service being cut, along with a significant number of workers who worked this shift. One kitchen station called Jamon was also closed down, only giving the workers there one week of notice before being laid off. This has set a tone of general fear and anxiety, with many wondering if their station or job classification will be targeted in the next wave of layoffs.

We have also struggled to keep an executive chef over the last two years of operations, and this has led to incompetency with how the kitchen is run, since there is often no lead besides the sous-chefs running the kitchen. Our current executive chef is a high strung person, often berating the sous-chefs and pushing the kitchen staff to work hard even when there is no work to be done. She also has a tendency to push everyone aside, allowing no one to help her when the rush comes, and is very particular about how things should be done, which is often at the inconvenience of the Bazaar workers. One example is the way she runs service on Tapas, one of the two kitchens in the restaurant. When she appears, all of the food runners step aside to give her space, due to her tendency to berate every little thing she sees us doing. And while she's there, she makes sure everyone is working, regardless if the food runners are taking one or two dishes. She's a boss through and through and has a long history of working with JAG in general.

## **Subjective Factors**

For FOH, servers and bartenders tend to be the most friendly to management across the board because they have to sell the concept of the restaurant and make money for it. Some servers and bartenders treat their support staff like servants who are beneath them: they can be very demanding, and will often turn to management to resolve their problems, especially against support staff and BOH workers. However, they constitute the minority. Most service staff care about making sure they can make money for the restaurant and selling the experience, because this directly affects their ability to make tips. This

causes some of the tension between them and support staff.

As for BOH, most kitchen staff have a positive relationship with the sous-chefs, who often stand in as the authority for the head chef if they are not there. They tend to work the hardest out of management in the sense that they are willing to get their hands dirty whenever work gets busy. They also tend to get along with the servers and food runners because they have shared interest in making sales. However, this is where the positives end: if the chef is there, sous-chefs go over to the side of management and act as supports for the chef's authority. They also will act as management when it comes to cutting on labor costs, and push kitchen staff to finish as fast as possible once the night ends. This in turn breeds discontent from the kitchen workers, but it's usually spontaneous and quickly simmers down. Fear of layoffs also aggravates the kitchen staff.

Workers consider management to be extremely incompetent. They have a reputation of taking forever getting issues resolved, whether it be mediating issues between co-workers, resolving scheduling issues, or approving time-off. Many of our coworkers have complained about the lack of respect, especially from the service manager, who has provoked many angry comments from kitchen staff and food runners. Even servers and bartenders, who tend to be the most friendly with management, have complained about the lack of interest from management in solving the problem of slow business. They think that management is only interested in finding "superficial resolutions" or "quick

money schemes” to bring in revenue instead of finding real solutions, which, according to service staff, often worsens the experience for guests.

In the Bazaar, Human Resources works out of the company’s home office located near the restaurant. The state union grievance process also exists. But most workers, if they have an issue, go directly to management to try and resolve it. Workers only go to HR if there’s a technical issue (e.g., not getting enough hours, paid time off, getting re-enrolled with the applications used by the restaurant) and not for anything serious. The state union grievance system is not usually used because of how long it takes to get in contact with our case manager and the main person responsible for handling grievances. The grievance process is not trusted and usually not worth the trouble.

The state union UNITE HERE exists, but in terms of actual structure, it’s very detached from the everyday lives of the workers. Our coworkers are pushed to be the ones which enforce the “actual contract” without having any leaders from the union within the shop to actually do this. No steward exists within the restaurant, and our main way of expressing grievances is through our case manager, who is very slow in responding to problems. The state union is very loose organizationally and relies primarily on the concept of the workers themselves being the stewards to enforce the contract rather than having leaders do it.

There are four immediate types of problems that the workers have expressed spontaneously: 1. Concern over

layoffs and job insecurity, 2. Fear of ICE, 3. Fear over the ongoing economic downturn at the restaurant and in the United States generally. Undocumented workers worry about not having enough resources to sustain themselves back home if they get deported. 4. Desire for respect at work, particularly from FOH management, and honesty concerning the financial situation of the restaurant, and demand for more competent management overall.

Bazaar workers lack the political consciousness needed to organize into something solid and concrete. The state union has all but given up its organizational leadership within the restaurant since winning their contract, and really only one or two people who had been actively involved in the union organizing have stayed in contact. In a sense, there has been a lowering of political consciousness because the state union brings an expectation of conformity. Rather than taking an active part in trying to organize or immediately respond to a problem, workers passively wait for some decision to be handed down from the union. This is a serious problem. Political discussion tends to remain at the level of airing out issues. Our coworkers often worry only how to resolve their subjective issues and fail to notice the larger objective conditions that are creating their personal problems and thus do not respond to them collectively.

There are prejudices among the workers like male chauvinism, especially among the line cooks and some food runners. The idea that women aren't "strong enough" is a common trope heard among these types of people. Oversexualization of women is another problem. The

former tends to be the most common among line cooks and is expressed against gay men too. There are prejudices against gay men, and oversexualization and demasculinization are a serious problem among the undocumented male workers across the board, minus those who work as servers, bartenders, some food runners, and hosts. Those who express such ideas constitute a vocal minority.

There is also a tendency among workers to rat on others who are perceived to be “lazy” or “slow,” especially when work gets busy and the pressure is on. This is especially common among the bussers and occasionally the food runners. This is when the servers and bartenders become the most annoying to deal with. Among the workers overall there is also a tendency to gossip, especially among the Latin American workers, which creates a culture of spreading rumors about others and of airing out other peoples’ business. There is a very small minority among the workers who are anti-communist and it’s common for these people to make jokes about revisionist states such as Cuba or Venezuela being “failed communist states”.

From 2023-2024, UNITE HERE launched its first successful campaign to unionize a restaurant in the D.C. area. However, this was mainly a win for the state union rather than the workers, because they delivered a terrible contract which has very few benefits, minimal wage raises, and brought almost zero changes at the restaurant. This led to a great demoralization and depression among the workers at the restaurant on the one hand and complacency on the other hand over the “holy grail” of the

state union being able to intervene upon their behalf. It has become fashionable now to blame the state union for everything, especially in the current economic downturn, and many see it as the reason why the restaurant could potentially close in the future. Almost all workers are irritated with the state union doing nothing and having no organizational presence, despite the high dues cost (\$60 every month). The result is a sort of separation in organizational principles among the workers where, instead of treating the union as the same entity as themselves, they see it as another or “better” HR, and this understanding has led to most of the frustrations among the workers in general when the state union doesn’t come through as they promised. Instead, it is seen as another burden, similar to the managers and HR.

## **NLOC Organizing**

We have been able to start becoming more consistent with producing articles, and have been able to garner a couple of supporters. It has been difficult to get the Editorial Board off the ground—one potential member is going through a process of self-criticism and has been inconsistent with labor activist work. The other member has not yet produced articles for their workplace but has started garnering support for the organization. With the absorption of Barista’s Voice, the top priority is creating a strong plan where tasks are equitably delegated and members are able to be held accountable for completing work. We need to set up a solid reporting system between cities and develop a more rapid turnover with articles.

At the end of this year, the Eurest location will be taken over by another subsidiary of Compass Group-Flik. While everyone has a guaranteed job after December, it is almost certain that the problems of staffing and unequal wages will not be solved in a timely manner, if at all. OCSW needs to put together a campaign that fiercely encourages workers to use their own power to solve the problems and continue to push the contradiction to a point of a strike or work stoppage.

We are working on a campaign regarding Starbucks and the SBWU strike. We have outlined demands that contrast the insufficient “tentative agreement” that the state union has put together, encouraging Starbucks employees to set up new strike committees with the goal of continuing and pushing the SBWU strike beyond the weak plans currently in place. Besides the location of the current OCSW contact, we will utilize the New Labor Committee system in other cities to help spread the campaign to new stores.

OCSW has an opportunity to re-organize and agitate the workers at the Bazaar against opportunism in the labor movement, class-conscious education through class struggle, and organize against the ICE operations. In particular the ICE operations have raised much fear and agitation among the Bazaar workers, as most are undocumented, and this is an issue which UNITE HERE or JAG has been unable to answer. Thus, OSCW has the task of organizing the defense of undocumented workers in the service sector industry, and using it as a way to push forward class-conscious, trade union organizing. Concretely, this will start by distributing shop papers pushing forward the idea of creating ICE defense teams

and developing rapid response tactics as the starting point, with the hope of unifying the broadest amount of workers on these basic demands.

# Strike the Stage

## Live Events Industry Overview

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in August 2025 there were 110,797,000 total "production and non-supervisory employees" in the private sector in the entire U.S.

Live event production is classed by the BLS under "Leisure and Hospitality." As of August 2025, this category represented a total of 14,826,000 production and non-supervisory workers, or 13.3% of the total US labor force. Of these workers, 3.0% were members of state unions and 3.4% worked under their CBAs. The average hourly wage for these workers is \$20.31/hr, the worst of all the main industrial categories outlined by the BLS.

Leisure and Hospitality is further divided into two main industrial categories: Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (NAICS 71) and Accommodation and Food Services (NAICS 72).

NAICS 71 consists of 2,607,900 production and non-supervisory employees, or 2.3% of the U.S. labor force. 5.9% were members of state unions and 6.8% worked under one of their contracts. Their average hourly wage is \$22.45 and they work an average of 22.9 hours per week. NAICS 71 includes Museums, Historical Sites, and Similar Institutions (NAICS 712) and Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries (NAICS 713). To be very specific about live *entertainment* production, we must look at the Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries subsector (NAICS 711).

NAICS 711 counts only 540,000 production and non-supervisory employees as of July 2025. If we remove athletes, musicians, producers, directors and "PR specialists," in order to concentrate ourselves more on the proletariat, this industry numbers 480,000 workers, or 0.4% of the private sector workforce. The only remaining occupation categorized by the BLS, once these other occupations are removed, and which is available online, is "ushers, lobby attendants and ticket takers," whose average hourly wage is \$15.95. Based on 2022 BLS figures, median wage for "entertainment attendants and related" workers was only \$14.34/hr in 2022 (adjusted for inflation, \$15.87 in 2025). Median wage for audiovisual technicians was \$24.36 (\$26.97 today); for sound engineers, \$29.17 (\$32.29 today).

If we use the above percentages of the total workforce represented by each industry, we can roughly estimate the number of live event workers in Pittsburgh. In Aug. 2025, there were 1,218,900 total non-farm workers in the Pittsburgh area. So we would expect to see something like 162,114 workers in Leisure and Hospitality overall, 28,035 workers in Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, and 4,876 workers in live entertainment specifically (excluding athletes, musicians, producers, directors, and "PR specialists"). The number of stagehands and A/V technicians in Pittsburgh, based on what we know about the numbers of workers on overhire lists used by employers in the area, could be as low as 1,000–1,500, but we need more information to know this with certainty.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "arts and cultural economic activity" accounted for 4.2 percent of the United States GDP in 2023, a total of \$1.17 trillion. If we use this as a rough estimate of the GDP of the live

event industry as a whole (NAICS 71), then 2,607,900 workers are producing \$1.17 trillion to the national GDP, or \$448,636 per worker. These figures by themselves are probably not enough to give us an accurate idea of the *real* exploitation of the proletariat in live events, they are just meant to illustrate the significant total value produced by workers in our industry relative to our comparatively small numbers.

A small workforce with a high economic impact is a favorable situation for organizing. We can cover a lot of ground quickly since we have fewer workers to win over, but we occupy an important place in the economy which gives us leverage and strength. On the other hand, a small industry means we have to take precautions to keep the identities of organizers hidden, especially in a small city like Pittsburgh. Small numbers in certain classifications of labor, like stagehands, indicates the possibility of a strategic bottleneck. This particularly true for the skilled workers (stage managers, technicians, riggers, etc.). It's logical, then, that the US bourgeoisie would want to be able to mobilize and pacify these skilled workers, which explains the prevalence of state unionism, particularly in large-scale concerts and corporate non-profit theater. The low wages paid to non-union stagehands, but especially to other classifications like ushers, even at IATSE-represented venues, means that these workers should be our focus since they are the most likely to take quickly to organizing. Our experiences confirm that this is the case.

The part-time nature of event-based work naturally poses problems to organizing, since workers have multiple jobs and may not see each other for weeks at a time. On the other hand, workers can get a better overall view of their industry because they have more points of contact with it

than workers in other industries, which gives us mobility and makes it easier to expand organizing to other companies. This is why we were able to launch *Strike the Stage* with an industry-wide perspective from the very beginning instead of limiting ourselves to one firm.

Similar to our previous report in *Labor Storm #1*, our report first focuses on the two major entities that hire labor in live event production, Flyspace Productions and the IATSE Local 3 hiring hall. These are major points of entry into the Pittsburgh live event industry for most workers. Practically every worker in our industry will at some point work in or alongside these two organizations. Then there is a section on NLOC organizing which is not specific to any employer.

## **Flyspace Productions: Festivals, mobile staging, corporate, casinos, outdoor concerts**

### **Objective Factors**

Number of workers: no concrete changes in data possible to report compared to *Labor Storm #1*. If anything the workforce has shrunk, since the number of festivals put on by Flyspace this year dropped by 3. We also know that an OSHA report from 2023 or 2024 listed Flyspace's average annual number of employees at 183.

Flyspace labor is split between "production," "event operations," "brand activations," and "Pittsburgh Mobile Bar (PMB)" departments. On the production side, Flyspace employs 13 full-time skilled or semi-skilled

laborers, of which 2 overlap with management but do not have direct firing ability. 10-20 part-time stagehands work for Flyspace the most often, a decrease compared to last year. They need around 150-200 seasonal part-time event ops workers to staff large festivals, mostly during the summer (this is a rough estimate). Occasionally they hire very skilled workers (A1 - head audio tech, L1 - head lighting tech, etc.) on a freelance basis, who work as independent contractors. They recently hired a new president and a new director of production.

Flyspace staffed and managed at least 5 major festivals so far in 2025: Three Rivers Arts Fest, Pride, Picklesburgh, Pittsburgh Jazz Fest, and Oktoberfest (upcoming). Flyspace's clients include Meadows Casino, the Pittsburgh Steelers, Highmark Health Group, Red Bull, (Duolingo - possibly dropped), the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, the Memoir Agency and more recently, Sheetz, the Allegheny County Airport Authority, the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, and a country club. The company has mostly lost two clients, Duolingo and Rivers Casino (labor at Rivers is now usually provided by Drusky or Larry Nation). Flyspace regularly provides mobile stages for events in states around the rust belt, Northeast and East coast, including in Ohio, Michigan, West Virginia, Delaware, New York, and Massachusetts.

Flyspace's warehouse has nearly all equipment necessary for a live event or concert from start to finish: generators, power runs, audio/lighting/video data cables, speakers, a small Chauvet video wall, various lighting fixtures, audio consoles, decorations, a fleet of trucks and mobile stages. When many events happen at once this inventory is stretched thin and Flyspace will need to rent equipment

last-minute from other local production companies like MediaQuest or Star Design. Equipment on Flyspace events is either:

- owned outright by Flyspace (some A/V, lighting and rigging equipment),
- partially owned by Flyspace and another company (their largest mobile stage is owned partially by the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and is worth around \$1,000,000 new with the trailer; other mobile stages are half-owned by their manufacturer, Montreal-based Stageline; certain equipment is partly owned by the Cultural Trust), or
- rented from another company, usually a client. Flyspace's largest mobile stage is one of only nine in operation in the world, so this stage is sometimes rented and transported across state lines.

Flyspace's reputation among workers has only gotten worse. Wage theft is still rampant: recently several part-time workers who work in event operations have had to contact management to correct paychecks that were paid at \$15/hr even though they were told their rate would increase to \$17/hr prior to their shifts. Early this year, management quietly implemented a policy where 30 minutes of every shift longer than 5 hours is automatically deducted for a lunch break. Workers have to email management to tell them they didn't get a break to get paid for their full shift.

Basic needs for workers on site like water are forgotten, food is almost never provided, parking is no longer reimbursed, warm water has been sent out in coolers with no ice on hot days. Logistics is a mess: on one large event, an extra truck was needed on load out, which went the next day, but this was not communicated to the site lead,

so workers drove trucks overloaded way past the weight limit, both dangerous and illegal. There is no transparency in scheduling. The app that workers use to request shifts is less transparent than it was in the winter and spring. Workers can no longer see even a portion of the schedule and can only see shifts when they are “invited” to work them by management, and even if they accept these shifts, management has to approve them, and workers are often only notified very last minute (24-48 hrs) if they will be working shifts they accepted a week or more prior. Frequently, shifts accepted by workers are given to others with no explanation whatsoever. Workers clock in and out on this app, which requires location permissions to send their exact location to management when they clock in and out. A very harsh and hypocritical late policy was sent out to part-timers recently: 3 late clock-ins past 5 minutes from scheduled start time, 1 no-show, or 3 call offs within 48 hours now all result in termination.

We think Flyspace is able to get away with the blatant abuses described above for the following reasons. First, a huge chunk of Flyspace laborers in the production and event ops departments are very young, early to mid -twenties or even teenagers. The youngest workers can be found among the part-time workers but there are some full-timers who are very young, too. Every year, fresh workers are hired during the Spring who are either college students, people who have recently moved to Pittsburgh and have a little bit of industry experience, or people who already lived in Pittsburgh who are making a career change and are new to the industry. Flyspace relies heavily on their ability to hire new workers.

The second reason is Flyspace is the only company that staffs and produces the major festivals held downtown.

They also work with important clients in Pittsburgh. If these clients are not bound to a contract with Local 3, they hire Flyspace. Other production companies in the area, to our knowledge, mainly produce corporate events and weddings. Drusky is the only company we know of that mainly does small concerts, with the exception of Four Chord Music Festival which is a major event, and even then they haven't yet been able to avoid renting Flyspace's stages and relying on their full-time staging staff to build them. Flyspace has bought up numerous smaller production companies and is the only company in the Rust Belt-Northeast region with as many mobile stages. All this gives Flyspace a near-monopoly in the Pittsburgh area.

Flyspace lately has increasingly relied on IATSE Local 3 to hire stagehands instead of their own workers. They stopped hiring them from Larry Nation after an incident where stagehands Nation brokered to Flyspace shirked their work during a show or did not show up at all. They also again hired labor from Qwick during Picklesburgh, an app that brokers labor mainly in the hospitality industry, and paid those workers \$5-10/hr more than what they paid directly hired event operations workers doing the same work. So the usual part-time workers for Flyspace are getting less work. Local 3 stagehands are paid \$35/hr, practically double the rate Flyspace pays its production laborers at \$18/hr, also to do the same work as them.

Following several complaints from production workers, the rate for specialized shifts like driving or working as an audio or lighting technician has been increased to \$20/hr. General production labor is still \$18/hr. Event ops workers now make \$17/hr. These rates are still below market rate for stagehand labor which is about \$25/hr for one-off freelance gigs in Pittsburgh. C-level executives are paid

salaries of at least \$100,000 and may be granted sign-on bonuses as large as \$50,000.

Flyspace has 8 UCC filings (records related to liens, which are filed by creditors establishing a stake in a debtor's property) on record going back to the end of 2022. 2 of these are duplicates of terminated transactions, possibly related to a clerical error. 3 liens from 3 different creditors are still active. The oldest lien is from November 2022, marked terminated, and another filing is listed from the same creditor (a bank in Ohio) five months later, also terminated, followed by a still-active filing which dates back to that same month. This could be due to a failed attempt to refinance the loan, a potential warning sign, but not enough to draw any clear conclusions. There have been no new filings since April 2024. These liens could be related to the seasonal nature of the work, or they could be related to a new expansion, which is probable given the company's recent purchases of new capital, rumors of talks to buy out a business which operates from their warehouse, and Jennifer Owen's report to the US Chamber of Commerce which lays out their plan to grow Flyspace by tens of millions in revenue over the next five years.

Flyspace staffed and produced an event for two country singers at Meadows Casino this year who were open Trump supporters—the main act walked out to a video of Trump saying the pledge of allegiance.

## **Flyspace's major clients**

The **Pittsburgh Cultural Trust** reported a \$18.9 million surplus (revenue minus expenses) and \$212.3 million in net assets or fund balances (assets - liabilities) in 2023.

**Highmark Health Group** reported a \$182.3 million surplus and \$1.92 billion in net assets in 2022.

The **Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership** reported a -\$200,000 overall loss in 2024 but a \$1.52 million surplus in 2023, and \$8.03 million in net assets in 2024.

The **University of Pittsburgh** reported a \$31.9 million surplus and \$7.31 billion in net assets in 2024.

**Duquesne University** reported a loss of \$870,000 in 2024, but a surplus of \$104.8 million in 2023, and net assets of \$766.9 million in 2024. Duquesne's net assets increased by \$50 million between those two years.

The **Allegheny County Airport Authority** reported a \$23.6 million surplus in their 2024 financial report (not including) another \$44.9 million in contributions and grants on top of that.

**Gaming and Leisure Properties, Inc.**, which owns **Meadows Casino**, most recently reported \$807.6 million in real profit after taxes. **Washington Trotting Association, LLC**, the subsidiary that directly owns Meadows, has estimated annual sales of \$11.19 million according to D&B models.

**Red Bull's** net profit in 2018 was \$650 million euros.

Dun & Bradstreet and Data Axle both put the **Pittsburgh Steelers'** sales around \$10 million.

**Sheetz's** annual revenue was \$7.2 billion in 2021.

The **Memoir Agency's** annual revenue is estimated at \$6.2 million by D&B.

## **Subjective Factor**

Workers at Flyspace are even more frustrated with the company, the owners, and middle management than they were in spring of this year. Practically all of them are now entirely against the idea of organizing with IATSE, and all production workers without exception express resentment towards IATSE and its hiring hall system, a positive development compared to our previous report. Recent situations where Flyspace workers have had to *supervise* IATSE hands being paid double their rate have aggravated this resentment. New workers (usually students or recent grads) can be curious about getting into the IATSE hiring hall, but once they do they are quickly disenchanted by it.

The IATSE hiring hall is a major obstacle to organizing. Flyspace management has proven that it is willing to hire IATSE stagehands in large numbers when needed instead of their usual workers, though we suspect this increased cost is unsustainable by for Flyspace long-term.

All part-time workers and most full-time workers are greatly in favor of ending the practice of working days going past 14+ hours, where working a 20-hour day is not uncommon.

## **Sports venues, theaters, Live Nation amphitheater: IATSE Local 3**

In April we estimated that about 400 workers in the IATSE hiring hall regularly take calls—though we think our estimations are still more or less right, the real number of active workers may be lower. This still makes IATSE the largest broker of stage labor in Pittsburgh.

This year, two overlapping stadium shows completely exhausted the Local 3 hiring hall, and the local had to make an extreme effort to find enough workers to staff these events. Mass texts were sent out to the entire overhire list telling them to tell "reliable" friends to call the IATSE call steward. Even former workers in the union's hiring hall who had some connection to a Local 3 member were encouraged to go through their contact list and try to get as many people as possible to work. In the future, event schedules should be scrutinized closely to look for overlapping events like this.

The lowest wage at an IATSE-staffed concert venue is \$24/hr, at Star Lake Amphitheater, a venue owned by Live Nation. This wage reflects the IATSE international's nation-wide contract with Live Nation. Because Star Lake is a 40+ minute drive from the city and the wage is so low, Local 3 often has trouble staffing events here. Smaller theaters that are organized by IATSE have wages as low as \$22/hr. The highest wage is at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's main venue, at about \$35/hr, though usually only workers with high seniority are able to take these calls.

Local 3 again staffed an event that Trump attended at Carnegie Mellon University despite major protests, including outside the building where the event took place.

The current Local 3 call steward is facing a lawsuit from a hiring hall member for refusing to call them for an extended length of time and ignoring their seniority date in violation of the Local's own rules.

A new venue that will be opening soon will not be relying on IATSE labor to staff its events, causing some discontent among Local 3 members. In the past, Local 3

has picketed at least one new venue that did this. This should be kept in mind when this venue is set to open.

Many lower seniority workers in the IATSE hiring hall hired post-pandemic are becoming more disillusioned with the union as its nepotism and secrecy is becoming more apparent to them. Numerous workers describe anger at Local 3 staffing all of Trump's events and refuse this work when it's offered to them.

## **Misc. Information on Media & Events Industry in Pittsburgh**

Research of the following companies is ongoing.

**Drusky Entertainment** is an event promoter which has staffed and produced events as large as Four Chord Music Festival, which was most recently headlined by Blink-182. Their overhire list likely numbers just under 100 workers. Not much reliable information is available on this company from data aggregators.

**Hughie's** is a production company based in Ohio. There are no UCC filings on record for this company. Data Axle puts their estimated revenue at around \$20.5 million, fairly large for a private production company, but Dun & Bradstreet's (D&B) model estimates \$2.89 million, a more probable estimate since there are no liens on the company's property. We have no clear information at this time about their share of the Pittsburgh market, just occasional contact with former employees.

**Hearcorp** is a Pittsburgh-area production company specializing in live sound. Based on anecdotal evidence of how often we see their equipment used, they are likely a

small competitor of Flyspace. D&B estimates their revenue at under \$1 million. They have 7 UCC filings on file, likely an excessive number for a company of their size. They have one notorious misogynist working for them that other workers and small production companies refuse to work with.

**Hollowood** is another audio rental house. Their annual revenue is estimated at \$2.18 million by D&B. They have hired some of the same hands that work for Drusky at their events this year.

**MediaQuest** is a Pittsburgh-area production company that mainly does corporate events. Their parent company, **Grand Sound Recording Studio, Inc.**, has an annual revenue estimated at \$1.57 million by D&B. This number is likely higher. MediaQuest has been known to fly their technicians to other states for events.

**Larry Nation** is a labor broker who staffs Stage AE, a major venue/amphitheater on Pittsburgh's north shore, which is owned by PromoWest (Anschutz Corporation).

**Encore Global** is an audiovisual rental house and production company that mainly does corporate events. Wages are notoriously poor, comparable to Flyspace. The company operates across the United States as well as in Canada and Mexico. A brief search on their website indicates that 1,360 venues in the US are “partnered” with Encore. They control a significant portion of corporate work in Pittsburgh.

## NLOC Organizing

Our main organizing activity consists in writing and distributing articles for our eponymous monthly workers' paper *Strike the Stage*. This paper serves as the organizing vehicle for the entire live events industry, so far just in Pittsburgh but we hope to expand to other cities in the future.

*Strike the Stage's* purpose is to make clear through facts the real conditions of our industry and thereby reveal the path we have to take for organizing, and to raise the class-consciousness of readers by making political principles like class struggle and the bourgeois character of the U.S. government and the state unions clear through real examples connected to the workers' everyday experiences at work. We thereby prepare ourselves for future class conflict.

In the first place this means we have to rely on real facts and numbers to come to accurate conclusions, and we have to make sure our information is well-sourced, or at least corroborated by multiple people in distinct roles when it comes to anything we learn about through word-of-mouth. This also helps the paper stand up to scrutiny, making it more convincing and harder to take down. This has been important when skilled workers who may not agree with all our conclusions are cautiously given copies of *Strike the Stage*, because they can at least respect that we know what we're talking about.

This is also why many of our articles have focused on the history of IATSE, so that we can know what stance we should take toward this organization. For instance, given IATSE's history of scabbing, we know to prepare

ourselves for the possibility of IATSE workers being dispatched to take our work when considering future actions. We also know from historical precedent that some of these workers will refuse to cross a picket line for any reason. Whenever possible, we try to make exposure of IATSE relevant to issues that come up organically at work or in the news. The same can be true of U.S. labor law and the NLRB. This point has to be made over and over again, since there are always new workers receiving the newsletter each month who have no prior context, and because these conclusions are not obvious to people who have not studied them. Many workers naturally feel resentment toward IATSE, but they usually do not know how IATSE came to be what it is today, and what that means for them. It also must be explained to non-union workers why critiquing IATSE is important at all.

The specific content for each article eventually becomes clear through our conversations with coworkers. For instance, if many workers are upset about a new grievance like the late policy, we have to address this. Political concerns must be addressed too; widespread hatred of ICE and the Trump administration invites us expose IATSE's role as a fascist institution, and to take this beyond just anecdotal evidence, like reactionary tendencies of certain union stewards, by citing history, current facts like the IATSE's letter to Trump, and their role in keeping labor peace.

This year we made two important changes: the first was to define the structure of the organization including defined criteria for organizers, the second was to be strict about producing and distributing a new edition of *Strike the Stage* every month. Both changes had an extremely positive effect, and distribution numbers and organizing

activity among live event workers have increased dramatically compared to our first year.

We organize based on a committee system, where committees are formed according to employer or category of work (e.g. security), since each one necessarily presents its unique difficulties. A general organizing committee is in the process of being formed to coordinate and direct work among all the different committees to make industrial economic actions possible. The NLRB system discourages this kind of coordination, but the proletariat *must* organize this way, and for our industry this is practically a prerequisite for any kind of meaningful activity. We also plan to form an Editorial Board which will work alongside the general organizing committee and direct production of *Strike the Stage*.

Criteria for membership in a workers' committee are simple: every member must 1. be reliable and capable of doing some kind of work for the organization (research, distribution, etc.) and 2. must adhere to the principle of class struggle. This allows workers to participate in closed organizing meetings. More open meetings are planned in the future. Other than airing grievances and sharing updates on noteworthy developments at work, these meetings are an important way to plan coordinated actions, even small ones that give us plausible deniability. Broader support from workers in many areas of work brings the possibility of organizing bolder actions that we can claim responsibility for, like strikes.

Hand-to-hand distribution of papers is the most important organizing activity because it represents the real connections between workers across different companies, and therefore reveals the structure our organizing

committees must take. When organizers are tasked with distributing the newsletter, they will have an easier or harder time distributing when working for one employer or another because of scheduling, opportunities given to them, etc. It becomes clear where each organizer should focus their efforts based on which workers they can get copies to regularly.

The regular production and distribution of *Strike the Stage* seems to have increased workers' confidence in us. It shows that we are able to do something reliably and that we're making an effort to engage with and win over our coworkers, which is more than can be said of the IATSE local officers who are usually indifferent or even hostile to them, or of the Democrats or revisionist socialists like DSA, PSL, etc. who all basically support IATSE.

As circulation of *Strike the Stage* has spread and become more regular, workers are now less prone to excessive sympathy with management or IATSE, and we've seen more evidence that workers are standing up for themselves and each other, a very positive development. Full-time workers are increasingly frustrated with meetings between workers and management that result in no positive change for the workers. Recent actions by Flyspace management like the strict late policy mentioned previously or more reliance on the IATSE hiring hall can be seen as retaliations against these rebellions.

## Columbus New Labor Committee

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Columbus has a civilian labor force of about 1,177,000 people. Of that, 1,121,400 people have employment compared to 55,600 people facing unemployment. This comes out to an unemployment rate of 4.7%. Data for gig workers are hard to come by but in 2019 there were about 106,978 people taking part in gig work in Franklin County. It is next to impossible that this number has not increased since then. The median household income is \$62k with a per capita income of \$36k.

Though the vast majority of workers in the city drive themselves to work, there is substantial and increasing use of the busing system. Central Ohio Transit Authority is the local transit monopoly. In 2019, before the COVID crisis, there were 19 million riders. As of 2024, that number has dropped to 11.9 million. We see ridership starting to tick back up. This is due to expansion efforts on the part of COTA and the renewal of late-night service. It should be said, COTA is infamous for their long rides and basic service. Many workers view COTA as completely inadequate.

The largest industries in the city are Professional and Business Service, which employ 18% or 324,000 people. These include mainly insurance, but also major sales companies for energy, chemicals, and military suppliers. Government workers are the next largest chunk of workers, making up about 16% or 288,000 workers. The next three above 10% of workers are Education and

Health (15%), Retail and Trade (11%), and Leisure and Hospitality (10%). Construction, Mining, Manufacturing, and Wholesale Trade altogether make up only 15% of the workforce.

The largest ten employers are JPMorgan Chase & Co, Nationwide (Insurance), Amazon, Cardinal Health, Honda, Huntington (banking), American Electric Power, Victoria's Secret, and Bath & Body Works. It should be mentioned that DHL & the Defense Logistics Agency employ 3,165 and 2,500 workers respectively.

The Democratic Party has a virtual monopoly on politics in the city of Columbus. The surrounding suburbs tend to vote Democrat but can easily swing the other way. The Republican Party, however, has been able to consolidate long-term power in the state through gerrymandering. Therefore, the major corporations have to deal with both ruling parties in order to set up business in the state capital. There does not seem to be a clear party receiving funds locally from the top companies.

Unemployment, besides during the COVID crisis, has remained steady for the past ten years. The biggest project happening in the area right now is in a nearby suburb. Intel is planning on building a chip-manufacturing plant using a \$28B investment to operate as a "mega-site" which could potentially accommodate eight factories. This is supposed to result in 3,000 new jobs. Another major site is the military manufacturer, Anduril Industries. They have been constructing a \$1B site, which is expected to create about 4,000 jobs. These, along with other expansions and construction projects, are developing the city from a financial and governmental center of the state to an industrial player.

It seems that the largest bargaining units are made up of Ohio Education Association (teachers). Most organizing campaigns in the city are around healthcare workers and Starbucks workers. Union organizing is often at a minimum in the city.

Living in Columbus, Ohio isn't easy. Even though we claim to be "cheaper" than other big cities, wages are basically stagnant. The minimum wage is \$10.70 but a living wage for a single person with no children is \$22.42 an hour. A single person with just one child would have to make \$40.21 an hour to live, whereas the median wage is about \$32.58. As already noted, public transportation is not a good option for getting around. The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,136 while for a two bedroom it is \$1,360.

We have been focusing our efforts on organizing a strike committee for Starbucks workers this upcoming month. They could go on strike for up to six weeks. We are trying to help lay the ground work with the contacts we have so that the Starbucks workers themselves will be the ones carrying out the strike and deciding when it will end. As of now we are only firmly organizing one shop. We will be developing its shop committee system and helping it to spread to other shops of the same company locally.

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## **Johnson City New Labor Committee**

Nestled in Southern Appalachia, Johnson City is the largest metro-area in the Tri-Cities of East Tennessee and makes up the majority of Washington County. There are two other towns in Washington Co., Jonesborough (Tennessee's oldest town) and Gray. To our north are Kingsport and Bristol in Sullivan Co., as well as Bristol, VA which doesn't have a county—the other cities comprising the namesake of our area. Towards our east we have Carter County with Elizabethton and Hampton, to our south is Unicoi County with Unicoi and Erwin. The Tri-Cities includes not only our largest towns but these smaller ones as well, and our medium-term strategy consists of organizing all of these counties in lieu of a large metropolitan area. To the far west we have Knoxville, Asheville in the south, and Charlotte in the south-east.

As the smallest city represented by a New Labor Committee, with less than a hundred thousand residents, there are many unique challenges and opportunities here compared to our larger counterparts, most notably is our abhorrent lack of heavy industry. We have no large factories, farms, quarries, or logistics hubs aside from the freight rails that destroyed JC's passenger-system several decades ago. The closest large factory is in Kingsport with the Eastman Chemical Plant, which also assists in the manufacture of high-powered explosives on behalf of the U.S. Army with the Holston Army Ammunitions Plant, an Amazon warehouse in Bristol, and quarries in Watauga. That being said, we have a milieu of smaller plants and

farms interlaced with each other, creating a true mix of rural and urban, and an abundance of suburbs. However, our city is mostly known for its medical and educational industries, largely due to East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and its Medical College, which heavily parasitizes the growth of commerce and real-estate and is reflected in a bloated, but stagnant, wealthy elderly population. Our work-force (32,218) is only about half our total population, but there is unfortunately a dearth of statistics regarding the makeup of our non-working population (bourgeoisie vs. officially retired vs. relative surplus/reserve army). We also have a large but statistically unverifiable commuter population due to our connection with the Tri-Cities.

Top Five Employers in Washington County<sup>i</sup>:

- East Tennessee State University (3,578)
- Ballad Health (3,300)
- Veterans Health Administration (2,188)
- Advanced Call Center Technologies (2,100)
- CITI Commerce Solutions (1,900)

Top Five Industries/Sub-Industries in Johnson City (ACS 5-Year Estimates)<sup>ii</sup>:

1. Health Care and Social Assistance (20.1%)
2. Retail Trade (13.2%)
3. Manufacturing (11.1%)
4. Educational Services (10.2%)
5. Accommodations and Food Services (10.1%)

Top Five BLS Sectors in Johnson City<sup>iii</sup>:

- Office and Administrative Support (16.1%)
- Food Preparation and Service Related (11.5%)
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical (10%)
- Sales and Related (8.6%)

- Production (7.1%)

Therefore, despite the medical and educational industries having the largest employers, our largest industry is actually the service industry, with the largest sub-industry being food service, followed by communications and manufacturing (in no particular order).

While the mean hourly salary in JC is around \$25<sup>iv</sup>, 70% of JC's population makes less than this average<sup>v</sup>, with actual working class jobs only paying an average hourly wage of \$12-\$17<sup>vi</sup>. Despite our "growing economy", JC has a high poverty rate of 21.1%, which is 6% higher than the state average and 8% higher than the national average<sup>vii</sup> — 9% of JC's population actually makes less than 50% of the poverty-line<sup>viii</sup>. With a population of 73,337, a 3.2% increase since 2020 (2023 saw the biggest increase since 1997) our per capita annual income is \$36,210 on average<sup>ix</sup> (about \$5,200 greater than it was in 2019) and has increased proportionally with inflation. This statistic, however, is heavily skewed by our bloated middle class, one that has existed for all of JC's history from its start as a petty-bourgeois settler-colony, but is today based out of the local medical and educational industries, both of which have seen increasing investments amidst an ongoing gentrification campaign led by the local ruling class (ETSU, JC Schools, Washington County Schools, Ballard Health, the Veterans Health Administration, and Frontier Health together employ 21.1% of Washington County's workforce<sup>x</sup>). It should be clear to most workers that increases to the small amount of "educated", wealthy, and middle class positions does not mean a better life for the majority of people, but can actually ruin lives due to inflation, gentrification, and a larger police presence.

In addition to our more recent influx of high income residents, spurred on by below-average costs of wealth after decades of capital flight, investments from the city (like the Downtown Improvement Grant Program<sup>xi</sup> and the Johnson City Remote Work Campaign<sup>xii</sup>) have created a higher demand (of rich people) for housing, inflating property-value and in turn increasing the property taxes the city can collect. Most recently, in 2023, a 25-cent increase to our local property tax was passed that will fund the development of consumerist and government infrastructure, as well as raises for the pigs<sup>xiii</sup>. This shows that JCPD has a vested interest in brutalizing poor and homeless people out of downtown JC and JC as a whole so they can maintain the inflation of property-value (consumption by the rich) and thus their own salaries. Our newsletter, Southern Appalachia Workers' Voice, recently exposed the collusion of the JCPD with serial-rapist and gentrifier Sean Williams, with our City Manager Cathy Ball even attempting to buy the latter's apartment, the one he used to rape women in, knowing he was a fugitive<sup>xiv</sup>. In return, the City is allocating over \$20 million to the JCPD in 2026<sup>xv</sup>. Although it may be the property-owners who directly pay property taxes, it is actually the workers, whose value is extracted by the capitalists and landlords, who pay for these taxes with their labor. Every tax on the rich is a ten-fold tax on the workers they exploit. The current median rent is \$1,084<sup>xvi</sup> while it was only \$860 in 2021<sup>xvii</sup>, with 42% of people having to pay upwards of 35% of their income on rent<sup>xviii</sup>. These rent hikes have led to increased evictions and homelessness, with many of those not immediately thrust onto the streets being displaced to the poorer surrounding towns like Erwin, Unicoi, and Elizabethton.

None of these issues are unique to Johnson City, however, and only reflect larger trends in the Tri-Cities, the United States, and World-Wide. The Tri-Cities region’s estimated population has reached 524,885, up more than 14,000 since the 2020 census<sup>xxix</sup>. Most of that growth has been since 2021, as the region grew by 1.2% in 2022 and 1.3% in 2023<sup>xx</sup>. Kingsport and Bristol are already going through similar forms of gentrification while their local ruling classes maintain the illusion of economic growth at the expense of the working class and oppressed masses. Clear examples of this are the fact that at least 46% of those living in Northeast Tennessee are living paycheck to paycheck<sup>xxi</sup>, with the unhoused population in the Tri-Cities increasing from under 400 to over 900 since 2020<sup>xxii</sup>! Campaigns that ignore the class realities of Johnson City only serve to accelerate and deepen this inequality and gentrification. Most recently, Johnson City announced that it will be “restoring” the previously low-income John Sevier Center apartments into a “boutique hotel” after displacing its poor and disable residents to new apartments on the outskirts of town<sup>xxiii</sup>. This disgusting act is the final nail in the coffin making downtown JC’s commercial district completely unlivable for working class people.

## **Subjective Conditions**

Johnson City, like Tennessee and the rest of the American South in general, has an incredibly under-developed and reactionary labor movement with low state-union activity. In 2024, Tennessee’s unionization rate was 4.7%, a 24% decrease since the 6% rate in 2023<sup>xxiv</sup>. The majority of JC’s locals are fascistic craft unions. By far the dominant state-union in our area is the AFL-CIO, with UA local 538,

CWA local 3871, APW local 365, UAW local 2155, IATSE local 699, etc., literally every single union in our area except for one, BLET local 781 (Teamsters), being an affiliate<sup>xv</sup>. Johnson City is also the seat of AFL-CIO's Upper East Tennessee Central Labor Council. Even our local DSA chapters (Northeast TN and YDSA-ETSU) refuse to touch these groups. Some other notable organizations around here are Tri-Cities Mutual Aid Network (TN/VA), engaging in standard capitalist mutual aid, Tri-Cities Renters United, an affiliate of Tennessee Renters United that really only exists in name only, and this new "Popular Front" organization at ETSU which seems to just be a rip-off of YDSA. Lastly, JCNLC has a sister-organization, Tri-Citians Resist Imperialism, a Johnson City pre-chapter of the People's Defense Committee who works with us on Southern Appalachia Workers' Voice.

Johnson City is a Republican strong-hold, and though we have significant Black, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ populations, this is a predominately White and reactionary area. The Johnson City Housing Authority literally has a monopoly over the Black community and ghettoization with its Keystone and Dunbar housing projects. Conditions here are abysmal. Johnson City also has a *de facto* segregated high school called Topper Academy (the "Alternative Campus") where it places all of its "problem" students. TA and the police-precinct are strategically-oriented near the predominately Black areas of JC to strong-arm New Afrikans into submission and conveyor large sections of them into penal-slavery. Our Latino community is largely isolated from the rest of Johnson City due to the language-barrier, the main exception to this being children and youth who've become fluent in

English. Although they have a milieu of *tiendas* in downtown to call their own, they are mainly housed in trailer parks and motels, on the outskirts of town, where ICE has been known to raid. That being said, we have nowhere near the level of deportations that larger cities have. Unfortunately, due to our low organizing capacity, we have yet to make inroads with these nationally-oppressed communities. We want to initiate various SICA campaigns once we have a proper division of labor. Tri-Citians Resist Imperialism will play the lead role in organizing broad committees for the nationally-oppressed, but JCNLC must play an important role in uniting the New Labor movement with the national liberation movements.

Organizing around here can be incredibly slow due to JC's small-size, its reactionary labor movement, and our bloated middle-class and student population, all of which tend to veil or blunt class-contradictions. We currently have 2 organizers and a contact list of 21 people overwhelmingly represented by the service industry, although only a small minority of these are active. Through our mass meetings, we've encountered consistent grievances in the service industry like customer harassment, below-subsistence wages, a lack of full-time positions, various tipping schemes, and incompetent managers who get promoted over more experienced, often marginalized workers. We hope to work with the Organization of Class-Conscious Service Workers (OCSW) to assist some of these contacts in organizing their workplace. Currently, JCNLC's main focus in terms of shop-organization is with the gig-sector, as this is where our main organizer works. We have yet to launch a shop-committee, but have written an outline that details many of the objective and subjective peculiarities for gig worker

organizing. In particular, gig-sector workers have no workplace, are personally financially-responsible for all physical costs of production, and are misclassified as independent contractors, meaning they have no access to the concessions enacted by the NLRA. This will require geographic-based construction of a shop-committee system that can substitute our lack of a cohesive economic organization with a political one. Alongside our general campaign around NLOC's Program of Struggle, we will be initiating a gig-sector oriented agit-prop campaign in order to draw in new contacts and prospective members that can assist our gig worker member with forming a shop-organization and shop-paper. We also call on all gig worker contacts nationally to assist in the formation of a central body akin to OCSW that can plan the expansion of local shop-committees, take editorial-control of a shop-paper, and work towards the formation of a Gig Workers Union and a Service Workers Industrial Union!

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# Oklahoma City New Labor Committee

The Oklahoma City Metro area has a total labor force of 787,881 people across its 8 counties. According to local labor statistics, there is a 3.3% unemployment rate, or 25,702 people. 68,325 people were defined as “gig” workers. Commuting in OKC is heavily reliant on car ownership: 81.9% of commuters drive alone, 11.6% carpool, 1.47% walk, 0.6% take public transportation, 0.17% bike to work, and 3.21% work from home, according to the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

Since the late ‘90s, the “MAPS” projects have increased development in central OKC, resulting in gentrification of Bricktown and Deep Deuce neighborhoods, with Black populations moving especially to the east side of the city. The Black population decreased by 9.2% in central OKC between 1990-2000, despite increasing by 7.3% in Oklahoma County as a whole.

A University of North Texas paper titled “Gentrification In Oklahoma City: Examining Urban Revitalization In Middle America” claimed: “Once again the spatial distribution of gentrifying areas within the OKC study area, identified by these factor scores, fits the hypothesis that Bricktown is the focal point of this revitalization, with gentrification spreading to the north through Midtown, the Asian District, the Paseo, and on both sides of the OU Medical Center.”

The top employers in the OKC Metro are the State of Oklahoma with 32,500 employees, Tinker Air Force Base

with 26,000, Oklahoma State University with 13,940, University of Oklahoma with 10,745, Integris Health with 10,000, Amazon with 8,000, Hobby Lobby Stores Inc. with 6,500, and Mercy Hospital with 6,000.

The state capitol resides in Oklahoma City along with other city and municipal organs. This plus the state's close proximity to the largest universities explain why it is the largest employer in the area. The Tinker Air Force Base complex employs thousands of civilian workers in the various construction and maintenance roles of large aerospace firms such as Boeing. The other biggest employers are the large warehousing centers in the city. There are massive Amazon distribution warehouses near the airport as well as the corporate center of Hobby Lobby, which also has corporate offices on a 10 million sq ft campus on the west side of the city.

The city has a particular interest right now in supporting the aerospace industry, as it has become a key industry for the city. This is evidenced by the massive infrastructure projects along the interstate around Tinker AFB and the expansion of the base's facilities, an expansion which the city claims could provide over 1000 new jobs. This has all happened in the wake of a massive layoff of civilian employees of the base back in February, in which 600 workers were terminated without warning in response to "budgetary constraints and shifting priorities in defense spending."

Another key industry for the city has been bio-science. The city is publicizing a \$35 million federal grant to help fund 6 new projects in the industry. This grant is largely focused on development in the northeast, an under-developed area. A large section of the Black population

moved to the northeast after gentrification pushed them out of the Bricktown and Deep Deuce neighborhoods, which are more centrally located.

Development has already begun on the “Innovation District,” a massive project using \$71 million in public funds. Local government describes it as “a thriving, 1.3 square mile ecosystem of collaboration, innovation and economic growth located in historic, Northeast Oklahoma City, surrounded by internationally acclaimed organizations spanning Oklahoma’s diverse sectors – healthcare, bioscience, aerospace & unmanned systems, specialized manufacturing, academia, technology and energy”.

Another notable business headquartered in Oklahoma City is Paycom, a payroll and HR “technology” company. Paycom recently terminated 500 employees at their headquarters. The company claims the layoffs happened because the positions were to be filled using AI-driven technologies. The most recent quarterly earnings report for Paycom, dated June 30, 2025, showed the company revised its forecasted annual revenue from a midpoint of \$2.03 billion to a higher midpoint estimate of \$2.05 billion. Paycom reported in the filing that it expected 2025 core profit in the range of \$872 million to \$882 million, up from previous expectations of \$843 million to \$858 million.

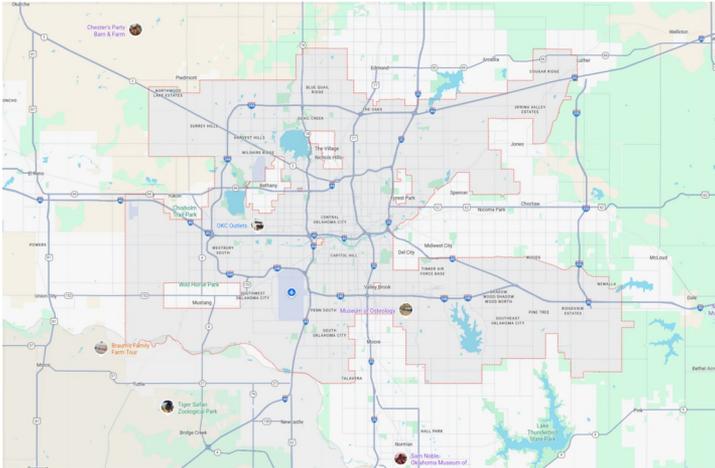
Votes over bonds for city infrastructure were completed on October 14th, 2025. There were 11 proposals made totaling \$2.7 billion and all passed. It is important to note that the proposal includes a “New Public Safety Training Center,” raising concerns about a possible cop city being built in the metro. A new police station will be built in

West OKC, and there will be a new headquarters for Embark, the local public transportation company that runs the bus lines and the trolley downtown. \$175 million has been earmarked for “economic and community development” that includes constructing offices for professional sports and the film industry, growth support for small businesses, land preparation for industrial sites, and incentives for affordable housing.

The largest bargaining units in the city include Pipeliners Union 798, Transport Workers Union of America Air Transport Local 514, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, International Association of Firefighters Local 157, and United Association of Journeymen 344 (Plumbers and Pipefitters). Other notable bargaining units with active campaigns include Starbucks Workers United and the American Postal Workers Union. Starbucks workers have organized several union stores in Oklahoma City and in nearby Norman under the SEIU and have an ongoing campaign appealing to public pressure. They use walk outs and pickets outside the stores to get ULP grievances addressed by the company as well as wages and other demands met. The most active store near the state capitol has routinely brought out members of other AFL-CIO unions in support and a regional organizer from St. Louis with the SBWU was recently in town to help organize a “practice picket.” They have said that actions will ramp up during the busy holiday season. The APWU has held public demonstrations at the capitol in protest of postal privatization.

The median per-capita income in Oklahoma City in 2023 according to the US Census Bureau was \$39,864 yearly, with the household median at \$66,702. Average rent varies according to the source, from \$926 monthly for a one-

bedroom apartment to \$1395 monthly for all housing types. The data comes from active listings on Zillow and Apartments.



This data is for the municipality of Oklahoma City, which is exceedingly large: it covers 607 square miles, making it the 10<sup>th</sup> largest municipality in the US. As is visible on the map, it completely surrounds several suburbs (The Village, Nichols Hills, Forest Park, Mustang, Bethany, and Warr Acres,) and passes them on two to three sides in several more cases. This is most extreme in the southeast, where the border to Oklahoma City sits next to the unincorporated exurban/rural community Newalla. The cost of living varies significantly across the city because of its large size. More specific research into different areas of the city would be required to get a better sense of average wages and cost of living in those areas.

As an example, let's consider an individual making the median income looking for an apartment. Their monthly income would be \$2,702, and the average one-bedroom,

as we established, is \$926, or 34% of their take-home pay. This is somewhat above the personal finance rule of thumb to spend 30% of your take-home income on housing, and this doesn't include utilities. One individual should be able to get an apartment without a roommate, but a person making the median income would need to room with another person.

An individual making minimum wage, which in Oklahoma is still \$7.25 (this roughly aligns with the average for the lowest household quintile), would take home \$1,122 per month, assuming 40 hours of work a week, every week without a break. Living alone on minimum wage is thus extremely challenging. The cheapest apartments in the city start around \$600 per month for rent. Note that the lowest quintile is based on household income and not per capita, so there is a significant portion of people in Oklahoma City living this reality and attempting to support more than one person.

There are several major construction companies that are constantly building in Oklahoma City. First is Allen Contracting, a construction company that specializes in highways. It is currently working on the I40/Douglas interchange. They recently completed redoing the I235/I40 interchange. Next is Manhattan Construction Company, which was founded in Oklahoma. Today it has offices in 8 different cities: Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Washington DC, Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Naples, and Tampa. They did the restoration for the state capitol building and constructed the new dome. They also renovated the Chesapeake Energy Center. Lingo Construction is another major company that plays a big role in renovating dilapidated industrial buildings in desirable areas such as Midtown. These spaces become

apartments, restaurants, or “community spaces.” Lingo just completed the brand new Citizen Tower at 602 N Robinson Ave. They are currently rebuilding a parking garage just down the street, beside the Department of Environmental Quality. They have worked on a lot of different hospitals and universities. Willowbrook is the fourth major construction company that is responsible for much of Oklahoma City’s new fabric. Currently, they are building the new Wheeler Apartments in that new development of housing just south of the river on South Western. They have also recently started a project on NW 4th and Broadway called Alley’s End, another housing project which is being touted as an affordable housing complex for families. They are building the brand new Behavioral Health Center at OU Childrens. Willowbrook recently completed the massive Oak complex on N Penn and NW Expressway. They also built the brand new West Village Apartments, The Muse, and Page Woodson.

Verbode is a real estate company that places a specific focus on real estate in the “urban core.” Their website claims they have over 10,000 properties available for sale. They sell various types of land, from residential to commercial. The most expensive home they are selling in OKC runs for \$16,490,000. They appear to be spearheading the sale of new housing developments close to downtown, west of the brand new Scissortail Park. They are working on a development on the north side of the highway called Strawberry Fields, which had a scandal associated with it in 2023. The properties sit between Hudson and Classen and SW 3rd and SW 7<sup>th</sup>, an area that was left neglected for years. The lower half is called North Shore, another neglected area. It sits between Walker and Hudson and SW 10th and SW 15th. A third area which has

long been abandoned sits on the right side of southern Scissortail Park. There are no clear plans on what is being done with it yet though buildings have been demolished. There is a through-line here where downtown development is spilling down into the south side, with the new Wheeler district to the west, recent developments in Capitol Hill further south, and proposals to demolish the public housing units of Will Rogers Courts and replace them with “mixed income” housing. Five years ago, a similar undertaking was attempted for Creston Park which failed miserably.

One of our first actions, along with studying our local conditions, was to study documents from the New Labor Press (“State Unionism in the United States” and the Shop Organizing Guide) to better understand the political line of NLOC, and to answer questions like how the line differed from “dual unionism,” how to orient ourselves towards workers under the state unions, what shop work looked like under this model, etc. We also studied the NLOC’s principles, objectives, and program, and united with them.

Our first event was helping with a public cookout in collaboration with local organizations People’s Defense OKC and Oklahomans Against Occupation. The event was very successful. We held it at a park near a splash pad and many members of the public came up for food. We ended up talking with activists. However, insufficient attention was given to what OKCNLC’s role in the event should be, due to the large overlap in membership between the OKCNLC and the PDOKC, and no mass contacts were developed at the event.

For our first event as an independent organization, we held a reading of “Our History: League of Revolutionary Black

Workers” for Black August. The plan was to use the text to discuss the history of the League, the relationship between the League’s political line and history and the NLOC’s political line, and to encourage attendees to apply that understanding to our current conditions. Discussion included the need to understand revolutionary history & Black revolutionary history, the need for workers to take a leading role in their organizations, the failures of state unionism, the need for organizational criticism, and the need for bold militant action in the labor movement. The event had great turnout, and most attendees were not PDC or NLOC members. Though productive, the discussion remained abstract and failed to connect to concrete organizing. The event was attended by a mix of activists and students, as opposed to proletarians, a contradiction that the attendees themselves pointed out.

So far we have participated in one strike, a SBWU strike back in May. There we talked to workers and handed out copies of the *Barista’s Voice* paper. We have kept in contact with the workers there, to support future actions and continue line struggle around state unionism.

Organizationally, the OKCNLC has struggled with its daily work, often making decisions meeting by meeting as opposed to developing a plan or strategy coordinated by leadership. We have also had some trouble with our research process, having done a lot of research ad-hoc without a definite plan to deepen our understanding of our local conditions and clarify our tasks. We are currently in the process of correcting this by improving the leadership structure of the organization, better implementing Democratic Centralism, and working to collectivize and organize our study process.

We have three workers currently interested in organizing their workplaces under the NLOC line: one at USPS, one substitute teacher, and one bus driver for Embark, the local public transportation system. The USPS worker is in contact with the newly formed New Day at USPS, and is developing contacts and the shop paper. The education work is in its infancy, but we are beginning conversations with other educators interested in the revolutionary line. We are looking at investigating our local conditions in order to develop a revolutionary educators' movement.

For the public transportation campaign, we started with a detailed analysis of Embark and its coverage across OKC. Workers at Embark have to deal with cleaning and maintaining buses and facilities that are falling apart due to neglect, poor or non-existent air conditioning in shops and buses, and heavy surveillance of workers. Frontline workers are represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union, which has virtually no shop presence among the workers. There are often tensions between the bus drivers and the passengers, as frustrations with the bus system from passengers is often taken out on drivers, and drivers are expected to enforce the rules of the transit system, which are often anti-people. Passengers also have grievances with the distribution of bus routes. Most routes lead to the more well-off parts of the city, and routes are sparser on the east side of OKC, which is predominately Black.

We are in the process of developing our first SICA campaign, starting with talking to people using the transit system, both as a way to talk to people about their work, but also to build connections among the passengers as a support force for a future organization of transit workers by connecting the demands of the workers with those of

the passengers. We are also planning more events, starting with a presentation on how to build shop floor organizing. We plan on holding regular workers' meetings as a place to discuss grievances and organizing strategy.

# Rhode Island New Labor Committee

The total workforce of Rhode Island is 588,800 workers as of August 2025, with total employment at 561,700. RI has 4.6% unemployment. This is about the national average at 4.5%, an increase from 4.2% in August 2024, though unemployment for RI has lowered from 4.8% in August 2024. The total number of seasonal workers was 82,437, or 14.67% of employees. The largest industrial group of seasonal workers were in leisure, hospitality, and food service at slightly over 10%, followed by construction at just over 4%. There is a trend toward gig work: 36% of workers in the US participate in gig work either part or full-time. Using that percentage as an estimate for Rhode Island comes to 202,212 people participating in gig work, since no other data is readily available for RI.

The largest industries by employment in RI are as follows:

1. Healthcare: 84,468 (17.06%)
2. Government: 1,754 (12.47%)
3. Accommodation & food services: 51,933 (10.48%)
4. Retail: 47,447 (9.58%)
5. Manufacturing: 39,893 (8.06%).

The following are the largest employers in Rhode Island by workforce. Combined these make up 13% of RI employment:

- Lifespan: 16,723
- US Navy: 8,000
- RI Hospital: 5,754
- Brown University: 4,629

- General Dynamics Electric Boat: 3,750
- CVS: 3,000
- URI: 2,500
- Kent Hospital Rehab: 2,301
- Miriam Hospital: 2,221
- Women & Infants Hospital: 2,038
- Dave's Marketplace: 2,000
- J Arthur Trudeau Memorial Ctr. (Nursing Home): 1,839
- Fatima Hospital: 1,800
- Raytheon: 1,800
- Butler Hospital: 1,500
- Kent Hospital: 1,433
- Amica Mutual Insurance Co.: 1,400
- Stilson Rd. Auto & Truck: 1,400
- Providence VA Hospital: 1,346
- Human Services Dept.: 1,200
- Blue Cross Blue Shield RI: 1,100
- Citizens Bank: 1,100
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- Landmark Medical Ctr.: 1,001
- ACS Industries: 1,000
- Amgen Inc.: 1,000
- Hasbro Inc.: 1,000
- RI Dept. Of Behavioral Health: 1,000
- Rites Theatre: 1,000
- Twin River Event Ctr.: 1,000

The median wage is approximately \$26/hour, while the minimum wage is set to increase to \$16/hour in 2026. The total cost of living in Rhode Island is estimated at \$2600/month for a single adult, the 10<sup>th</sup> highest in the country. Rhode Island has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rent of the 50 states: a 2 bedroom apartment at median rent is 54% of the

median wage after income taxes (est. 20%). In Providence, Mayor Brett Smiley lowered taxes on properties with 6-10 residential and commercial units, raised taxes by 1% for properties with 11+ units, and proposed raising tax rates for single family homes by 4-5% and properties with 2-5 units by 16%. Providence city council “compromised” with a 6% increase for single family homes & owner-occupied 2-5 unit properties, 13% for 2-5 unit non-owner occupied, 1% for 5-10 units, 4% for 11+ units, and 0% for commercial units. Obviously they both cut the big landlords a deal and passed the burden onto smaller landlords and working homeowners. Because most housing stock in Providence are duplexes, the cost will be passed onto the majority of tenants.

We visited the Butler Hospital strike a few times before the strike ended. Many rank-and-file union members seemed generally unaware of what happened at bargaining meetings, union reps would simply fill them in afterward. Most had a belief that the fight really happened at the bargaining meeting and not on the picket line. The picket line was not militant, as the union reps wouldn't allow people to block roads and even encouraged members to ignore people crossing the picket. Police were around constantly as well and a couple times over the course of the strike tried to charge people with noise infractions if they honked their horns in solidarity with the strikers. Despite the lack of militancy or democracy, most had generally positive views of the union. The strike lasted 3 months; the union held out for as long they did in order to win wage increases for the lowest paid staff, but still ended with only a \$5 wage increase over the course of 4 years. The hospital also managed to keep in a clause saying that workers' compensation issues will be dealt

with using a “time bank” system so that money wouldn’t come out of the hospital’s income. According to the union, 99% of those who participated voted to ratify the contract.

A member of the NLC who is a chemist works at a shop with many departments. He has been working to get close to the more proletarian sections, in particular the cafeteria workers who are under the same company that the OCSW member is under. He has identified a couple people interested in the NLC work, but he has not yet gotten them to meet outside of work.

The member in manufacturing has been working to politicize their coworkers towards an independent unionist line. There is a union at their shop that is in the bargaining stage of the contract and they are attempting to agitate over it. They have identified some more politically advanced coworkers. Their goal is to meet with at least one person by the end of November in order to discuss forming a shop committee.

The member in OCSW is currently working on establishing a campaign over the company switch that is set to happen in December. There are currently a couple consistent readers but neither seem fully committed to the idea of an action right now—we are hoping to increase readership and convince current supporters of the need to prepare a work stoppage if the switch goes poorly or new management springs major changes on the workers, and to get them to be more active in organizing over the account takeover. Another coworker seems interested in setting up a meeting with everyone outside work to discuss what we want under the new company.

# Working People’s Association of Charlotte

Charlotte, North Carolina is one of the fastest-growing cities in the entire country. Over 150 people move to the area every single day, and the city's population has grown from 623,000 in 2005 to 943,000 in 2024. However, the growth of the city has not been met with an improvement in working and living conditions for working people living in and around the city.

North Carolina is often labeled the “worst state for workers,” due to its minimal labor protections and the lowest corporate income tax rate in the nation. These state-level issues have direct implications for Charlotte workers who experience some of the worst working conditions of any major city. Charlotte is the least unionized major American city, just 1.4% of workers in the Charlotte metro area are unionized, totaling just over 16,000 unionized workers. A 2015 study found that Charlotte workers clock in an average of 43.5 hours a week, tied for second longest among major U.S. cities. In 2023 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that Charlotte workers across industries earned less than the national average for that industry, meaning Charlotte workers are working longer hours and being paid less with fewer protections than workers in nearly any other major city in the country.

As the population has soared, so has rent, leaving many who work in the city unable to live there. The average rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$1,700 dollars, while the median income for individuals \$44,000. A 2024 report by

the ruling-class-backed Charlotte Business Journal found that the income needed to live “comfortably” in the city was \$101,000 dollars. Due to the below national average incomes and rising rents, Charlotte has a large commuter workforce: about half of the jobs in the city are filled by workers living outside the city. On top of this, through the deviously named “corridors of opportunity” initiative, the city of Charlotte is working with corporations to systematically push out and displace historic working-class communities in East, West, and North Charlotte, replacing them with out-of-town transplant finance and banking workers.

Charlotte is known as a finance and banking city: there are over 100,000 people employed in these sectors, more than three times the national average. The city is situated within 250 miles of three major ports, connects to two major highways, services two major railroads, and is home to the seventh busiest airport in the world for aircraft operations, making Charlotte a key hub for logistics in the United States. 90,000 people work in this industry. FedEx, Amazon, USPS, XPO and American Airlines make up the major employers. While not large in scale, the city also has a sizable manufacturing industry, with Dailmer Trucks, IBM, and Corning Optical as the biggest manufacturing companies in the area.

The WPA recently held a number of public events in addition to our weekly workers’ meetings, including a presentation on the Loray Mill Strike and discussions on Black August and Juneteenth.

While the WPA’s “workers’ night schools” and joint events generally bring out interest in the organization and have decent attendance, the organization hasn’t been able

to turn this into actual recruitment into the organization. One problem is that the people who come tend to be petit bourgeois, which is not who the WPA is looking to recruit. But the primary issue is the WPA's recruitment methods. The WPA has not yet developed a systematic method for recruitment, including organized education plans to unite supporters around the class-conscious principles of the WPA so they can be recruited into the organization.

The workers' weekly meetings have regular issues with economism and unproductive discussions, acting more like workers' therapy sessions instead of time dedicated to reporting on, planning, providing guidance on and encouraging the development of shop organizing work. As an organization more generally, it has been pointed out a few times that the WPA suffers from amateurish practices, disorganization and liberalism. In late May we launched an internal rectification effort aimed at correcting these errors. Since then, new practices have been established to correct our previously disorganized methods. In particular, as it relates to shop work, all members are now required to develop regular plans for their own shop organizing and report them to the organization. All members also write up "workplace maps" that serve as both initial reports and foundations to build their plans on. The practice of criticism and self-criticism is also being more regularly practiced by all members of the organization. Overall, the organization has successfully corrected some of its poor practices from before, but correcting amateurish practices, disorganization and liberalism is an ongoing practice and far from complete.

Going forward the organization will look to improve its united front work and outreach in order to find workers who are already advanced and active, and who could be

pulled into the WPA. This will be important because over the past year, the organization has become isolated from the local activist scene, and while we should not base ourselves among the activists, there is still a section of activists who are workers and could be quickly drawn into WPA work.

To overcome anarchistic and uncoordinated shop work, the WPA aims to set up monthly shop organizing meetings. These will be meetings of only WPA members and select contacts dedicated to serious discussion and planning shop work. In addition, the WPA is centralizing all shop work under the organization, meaning members will be expected to carry out directives given from these meetings in their shops. Hopefully, this will eradicate the laissez-faire style of shop work in favor of a much more systematic, planned, and goal-oriented style. By the end of the six months, this will hopefully have led to the development of local industrial committees to help facilitate shop work and investigation into particular industries.

Additionally, the organization has always been dominated by men. This is a major contradiction, especially in a city whose workforce is 52% women. Many women have shown up to WPA meetings, but the organization has completely failed at pulling them in and incorporating them into the organization. The WPA has had a recent surge of support and interest lately, particularly among women workers. We must intentionally restructure our recruitment, leadership, and work practices to improve recruitment as a whole but particularly among women, while avoiding tokenizing them. We must be prepared to follow up with anyone who attends our meetings and have meaningful tasks which they can be given.

The WPA has to transform shop-floor work from sporadic activity into disciplined, strategic organizing rooted in class struggle. It is not enough for members to simply show up at work or share grievances. Organizing in shops must be purposeful, visible, and systematic. Purposeful shop organizing requires clear tasks and concrete goals, not vague hopes. Shop organizers must study and map out their workplace and answer questions like where is power held, what are the bottlenecks, who is oppressed, and who can be mobilized. Organizers must identify specific issues like safety hazards, wage theft, discrimination, abusive supervisors, etc., and build campaigns around them. WPA leadership should regularly check in with organizers in shops, offer guidance, and help them overcome obstacles, including providing political education and resources when needed. At the same time, there must be real rectification plans for chronic neglect: missed deadlines, unfulfilled responsibilities, or dropping work without notice should be immediately criticized and analyzed by the organization.

# Abbreviations

AFL-CIO: American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

ALU: Amazon Labor Union

BLS: Bureau of Labor Statistics

FTC: Federal Trade Commission

IATSE: International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees

IBT: International Brotherhood of Teamsters

NLRB: National Labor Relations Board

OSHA: Occupational Safety and Health Administration

SBWU: Starbucks Workers United

SEIU: Service Employees International Union

ULP: Unfair Labor Practice