

Strike! Baristas at Starbucks Stage One-Day Walkout Nationwide

Article By:

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The ongoing nationwide union drive at Starbucks has provided much drama and case studies on a host of labor law issues. With more than 300 cafes and 9,000 workers voting in unions over the last two years, the organizing boom at the chain has been uncanny - especially considering that prior to two years ago, the coffee giant had zero unions.

While unions have been very successful in getting Starbucks workers to join their ranks, they have not enjoyed, at least to date, much success at the bargaining table, as no collective bargaining agreements have been signed with respect to any of the new bargaining units. In light of that, on Nov. 16, we saw thousands of Starbucks employees walk out and go on a one-day strike at more than 200 cafes around the country.

According to the Associated Press, “The Workers United union

chose Starbucks' annual Red Cup Day to stage the walkout since it's usually one of the busiest days of the year. Starbucks expects to give away thousands of reusable cups Thursday to customers who order holiday drinks. The union said it was expecting more than 5,000 workers to take part in its 'Red Cup Rebellion.' Workers were expected to picket for part of the day and visit non-union stores the rest of the day, the union said.”

The article noted worker frustration with the perception that the bargaining process is moving slowly, saying “Edwin Palmasolis, a Starbucks employee for more than two years, joined the picket line Thursday in front of his New York store. His store voted to unionize last year, but so far Starbucks and the union haven't started bargaining. He thinks a contract would help improve working conditions at his busy Manhattan store.”

This is the largest strike action yet by Starbucks unions. However, it doesn't seem to have affected Starbucks' bottom line as of yet, given the chain is having a record year and profits have risen 12 percent so far in 2023.

Any employers facing a strike or similar one-day walkouts should be mindful that various legal issues come into play that may prevent a company from disciplining or terminating an employee in these circumstances.

We'll see how this ongoing saga continues to unfold. Stay tuned.

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