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Teamsters strike Hood River Distillers

The producer of Pendleton Whiskey, Aviation Gin, Jose Cuervo tequila, and Monarch spirits imposed its own terms.

Twenty-five workers at Hood River Distillers (HRD)—members of Teamsters Local 670—went on strike May 6 after their employer, during the COVID-19 pandemic, implemented its own final offer that alters health insurance benefits and provides paltry wage increases.

The union filed unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board alleging that the company bargained in bad faith and made unilateral changes to terms and conditions of employment. It is considering taking other action as well. HRD also filed an unfair labor practice charge against the Teamsters, alleging the union refused to bargain in good faith.

“Throughout the 13 months of negotiations, the company continued to flout federal labor law with a ‘take it or leave it’ style of bargaining focused on weakening the longstanding protections and benefits enjoyed by the workers,” said Michael Beranbaum, secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Local 670.

The company gave what it called its final offer on March

30. When the union requested to meet in person with a federal mediator at the first available date, the company refused. It implemented the contract on May 1.

Pickets went up at 10 a.m. May 6. Picketing continues daily from 6 a.m. to around 8 p.m.

Historically, the union has had an amicable relationship with the company, Beranbaum said. Teamsters have represented workers there for more than 50 years. This is their first strike.

Beranbaum said the tone changed after HRD brought in a new human resources director and chief financial officer. The new management team, despite having never bargained a labor agreement before, are in charge of negotiations.

“This is a flagrant example of an employer putting profits before people,” he said. “Our members take immense pride in the work they do to produce quality distilled spirits, which are distributed across the country.”

Teamsters represent blending, packaging, and warehouse employees at the plant, as well as truck drivers and mechanics.



Sue Bell and her daughter Kelli walk picket line at Hood River Distillers. Sue's mother—and Kelli's grandmother—is retired from the plant after 40 years working there. Twenty-five members of Teamsters Local 670 walked off the job May 6 after the company unilaterally implemented a contract that changed health insurance over workers' objections.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Teamsters are asking allies to call and/or write to HRD board chair Ron Dodge at 541-386-1588, HRDsales@HRDspirits.com, or 660 Riverside Dr, Hood River, OR 97031.

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