

New York Fast Food Workers Walk Off the Job

(excerpted from a report in Labor Notes by Alexandra Bradbury, November 29, 2012, <http://labornotes.org/2012/11/new-york-fast-food-workers-walk-job>)

“Good morning! I’m on strike!” shouted McDonald’s worker Darryl Young on a crowded Manhattan sidewalk at 7 am today, as supporters rallied outside the Madison Avenue fast food outlet where he works. “Wanna know why? \$7.25!”

After two years working at McDonald’s, Young is making only \$7.25 an hour, New York State’s minimum wage.

That makes it tough to support his two daughters, he said, and many of his co-workers rely on Section 8 housing assistance, welfare, and food stamps to get by, while the corporation they work for makes billions in profit.

That’s why Young joined the organizing committee a couple of months ago. He and a friend have been meeting daily and approaching fellow employees at the store “to see if they want to get down with the union,” he said.

Young said he was “a little nervous” to strike today, but he found the courage because of “the struggle every day—waking up and coming to a job I don’t want to do.” ...

Some fast food workers have already been suspended for union activity, organizers said, and they expect further retaliation in the wake of today’s action. If that happens, “we have community, labor, and clergy ready to stand up and bring workers back to work,” said [organizer Jonathan] Westin. ...

“Our goal is to galvanize as many workers as possible,” he said. No one is without fear, but “going back and making \$7.25 an hour, and not being able to put food on the table, is a much harder thing than striking for better wages.”

Fact Sheet: Fast Food Workers Strike

What happened?

- On November 29, 2012, hundreds of fast food workers in New York City - at McDonald's, Wendy's, Dominos, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Taco Bell - walked off the job for the day. It was by far the largest series of job actions at fast-food restaurants ever.
- Their demands: the right to unionize, and an hourly wage of at least \$15 an hour.
- The strike didn't just happen – it was the result of much planning by workers and their allies. It was organized by a new cross-company Fast Food Organizing Committee that is supported by unions and civil rights groups. The action is part of a campaign called [Fast Food Forward](#).
- In a statement about the strike McDonald's said it "values our employees and has consistently remained committed to them, so in turn they can provide quality service to our customers." The statement added that most of McDonald's restaurants are owned by franchisees, and offer competitive pay and benefits.
- A former McDonald's franchise director said that raising workers' pay to \$15 per hour would be an "insane increase" that would add at least \$1 to \$2 to the cost of a fast-food sandwich. "There goes the Dollar Menu," he said.

About fast food workers

- Two-thirds of fast food workers are women.
- Their median age is 32 years.
- Fast food companies pay their workers wages that are close to the federal minimum wage, which is \$7.25 an hour. McDonald's crew members earn an average of \$7.63 an hour.
- Most fast food workers are given only 20 or 30 hours of work a week, which keeps their annual income far below the poverty line.
- Fast food companies rarely provide workers with health insurance, paid sick days or other benefits.
- There are over two million fast food workers in the United States.

About the fast food industry

- In New York City, the fast food industry has grown by 55 percent since 2000, 19 times faster than private sector employment overall.
- Taco Bell and KFC's profits have risen nearly 50 percent over the last four years, and McDonald's have jumped 130 percent.
- Fast Food Forward, the group that organized the strike, has charged that some restaurant managers have threatened to fire workers for striking or supporting a union or have improperly interrogated workers about backing a union drive.