

Dakkota auto parts workers walk out, impacting production at nearby Ford Chicago plant

Marcus Day
7 August 2024

Work at Dakkota? Fill out the form at the end to tell us what you are striking for and to discuss forming a rank-and-file committee.

Workers at the Dakkota Integrated Systems auto parts plant on Chicago's Far South Side walked out at noon Wednesday, after rejecting a tentative agreement between the United Auto Workers and the company.

The workers voted down the UAW's tentative agreement over the weekend by approximately 87 percent, a source told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. The roughly 450 workers at the Dakkota plant are members of UAW Local 3212, an amalgamated local which covers several parts plants in the area.

The Dakkota factory supplies the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, which recently marked the 100th anniversary of its opening. Dakkota workers build front and rear suspensions for the Ford Explorer and Lincoln Aviator SUVs.

Workers in the area reported that the company had been training replacements in recent weeks and had already begun bussing in strikebreakers on the first day of the strike.

A Ford Chicago worker told the *WSWS* production was slow on Wednesday evening, adding, "I heard they're bringing in scabs to work because Ford isn't going to stop."

Another Ford Chicago worker told the *WSWS*, "I support them fully in trying to get fair pay for the long hours and strenuous work that they do in the auto industry."

At Ford Chicago, UAW Local 551 Chairman Alan "Coby" Millender, speaking on behalf of the company, ordered workers to continue working, writing in a post on Facebook:

Heads up membership. Dakota [sic] walked out at 12 pm. The strike will affect Chicago Assembly. The company has decided to utilize this time to set up training within the department. B-crew will run tonight. I will keep the membership informed as information is provided.

But Ford Chicago workers have already responded with calls to refuse to handle scab-made parts. As one worker wrote in a pointed question to Millender, "If scabs are going to be making these parts for union built cars, are we actually going to install these scab built parts? If we do install them, isn't this a slap in our union brother's and sister's face who are on strike?"

Rank-and-file Ford Chicago workers should organize discussions on the floor and widely raise the demand for a ban on scab-made parts from Dakkota.

There is a long history in the labor movement of workers refusing to handle products made by scabs. During the Pullman strike in 1894, members of the American Railway Union refused to handle sleeping cars manufactured by strikebreakers at the Pullman Company in Chicago.

But in more recent history, the UAW bureaucracy has repeatedly forced its members to handle scab-made parts.

During a weeks-long strike by Clarios battery workers in Holland, Ohio, last year, the administration of UAW President Shawn Fain, newly in office, refused to implement a ban on scab batteries, despite widespread support for one among Big Three autoworkers.

The UAW national headquarters has written nothing about the Dakkota strike on its social media accounts or its website as of this writing, instead posting repeatedly about a UAW rally to promote Kamala Harris and Tim

Walz, the candidates for the pro-war, big business Democratic Party. During the Clarios strike, the UAW maintained a virtual blackout, keeping UAW members nationally in the dark about the struggle.

No faith should be placed in the union apparatus to wage a real struggle. The most significant outcome of last year's bogus "stand-up" strike, which left the majority of workers on the job, has been a growing jobs bloodbath, with Ford, Stellantis and GM all announcing mass layoffs numbering in the thousands this year.

Ford Chicago was among the few plants called out on strike last year, weeks after the national contract had expired. Workers at parts suppliers which were shut down as a consequence, such as the Lear plant in Hammond, Indiana, were forced to subsist on state unemployment benefits and refused strike pay by the UAW out of the union's \$825 million fund.

The UAW's contract proposal rejected over the weekend makes clear that the company and the bureaucracy are utterly indifferent to workers' interests. The deal would have raised starting wages for new hires to just \$16.80 an hour—only 60 cents more than Chicago's minimum wage—with pay for senior assembly workers topping out at \$21. Starting wages would rise to only \$18 an hour by 2028, the final year of the contract, and top pay to \$25.

At a Dakkota plant in Louisville, Kentucky, that supplies the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant, workers also voted down a "last, best and final offer" in early June.

Workers in Chicago should be on guard against attempts by the UAW apparatus to shut down the Dakkota strike in the coming hours or days, which, if recent experience is a guide, it will attempt to do.

At the Lear Seating plant in Wentzville, Missouri, last month, the UAW shut down a strike after just three days, before workers had even seen the contract proposal, let alone voted on it. The strike had swiftly had an impact on production at the nearby GM Wentzville Assembly plant, due to the just-in-time supply chain model, in which very few parts are stockpiled to lower costs.

The UAW announced that the contract at Lear passed on August 2, after the local had told workers in the run-up to the vote that the UAW International headquarters would refuse to call another strike if they voted down the agreement.

The recent struggles by auto parts workers—among the most exploited and lowest paid in the auto industry—are an indication of their ongoing dissatisfaction and growing militancy, which Fain and the UAW apparatus have thus

far hoped to contain with limited, ineffective strikes.

Auto suppliers are continuing to struggle with a labor shortage, according to a report in industry publication *Automotive News* on August 1. The relative challenges with hiring and retaining workers at the parts plants remains despite the growth in unemployment, driven by the Federal Reserve's high-interest rate regime, which has had bipartisan support in Washington.

Pointing to the underlying concerns among the corporate elite and their political representatives, *Automotive News* quoted a consultant who said, "We're still raising wage rates—at a smaller percentage than we were in 2021 and 2022 but still bumping up wages regularly."

In response, parts companies such as Lear and Forvia are increasingly turning to new industrial automation technologies. Instead of being deployed rationally to ease workloads and shorten the workday, corporate management is using automation to shed jobs, a process also taking place at companies such as UPS, and at tech and professional services firms through the use of artificial intelligence.

There is widespread desire for solidarity with Dakkota workers throughout the region, but workers themselves must take the initiative to mobilize the latent support into a broad and collective fight.

Workers at Dakkota should form rank-and-file strike committees, in order to link up with workers at Ford Chicago, Lear, Flex-N-Gate, Tower and other companies. A rank-and-file committee at Dakkota would provide the means for workers to draw up a list of demands based on their real needs, including a 50 percent wage increase, cost-of-living raises and major improvements to working hours and safety conditions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact