

“We need a worldwide strike”: Striking Dakkota auto parts workers call for expanded struggle

George Marlowe
18 August 2024

Work at Dakkota, Ford or in the auto industry? Fill out the form below to get involved with the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network at your plant.

As the strike by nearly 500 Dakkota Integrated Systems auto parts workers nears its third week, there is growing anger among workers at the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly Plant about having to handle scab parts from the struck factory.

Significantly, workers at both Dakkota and Ford Chicago have begun to develop a strategy to prevent the strike from being sabotaged by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, which has virtually blacked out information about it.

On Friday, rank-and-file workers at Dakkota and Ford Chicago issued a joint statement titled, “Support the Dakkota workers strike! Ban scab parts and launch a rank-and-file counteroffensive!”

The statement reads:

We, the rank-and-file autoworkers of Dakkota and Ford Chicago Assembly, are appealing for the broadest mobilization of support and solidarity for the strike at Dakkota. To prevent the strike from being defeated, we call for workers to take collective action and refuse to handle scab-made parts at Ford Chicago Assembly.

It’s clear that the UAW bureaucracy is ignoring the will of the membership at Ford Chicago (CAP), which is disgusted at being ordered to work with scab parts. If there were a vote held tomorrow at CAP on whether to stop work in solidarity during the Dakkota strike, there is little doubt that it’d be overwhelmingly in favor.

The reality is that the UAW bureaucrats are working on behalf of the companies to divide us. Every day that Ford continues building SUVs, the strike at Dakkota is undermined and weakened.

Urgent action and real solidarity is needed, not just words. Dakkota is a critical battleground in the class war being waged by the corporations against the working class. While the companies are trying to suppress wages at the parts suppliers, they’re simultaneously accelerating their global jobs bloodbath.

The statement appealed to workers to join and build rank-and-file committees at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant and Dakkota to mobilize

the widest support and develop a counteroffensive across the auto industry to fight for jobs, wages and better working conditions.

“A slap in the face”

Earlier this month, Dakkota workers rejected a UAW-company tentative agreement by an overwhelming 87 percent. The offer would start new hires at \$16.80 an hour and \$21 for senior workers, topping out at \$18 and \$28 respectively by 2028. Since the deal was rejected, UAW Local 3212 officials floated a nearly identical offer from the company, but did not bring it to a vote after it provoked widespread anger among workers.

One Dakkota worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The only thing they’re doing is bringing up the bonus—that’s it. From \$1,713 to 2,500. But everything else is the same on the contract.” The worker called this a “slap in the face” and a bribe that she and others do not accept.

The UAW’s previous deal with Dakkota would have kept workers far behind the skyrocketing cost of living in Chicago and the northwest Indiana region. A recent report by the *Chicago Tribune* noted that renters need to make \$88,000 a year just to afford an average apartment listing. Between March and June alone, average rent went up \$120, a 7 percent increase in three months.

The typical cost of rent in Chicago for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,200 a month. That does not include the high cost of gasoline and food. Many workers at Dakkota have struggled to pay their bills and are forced to take on debt, and choose between food and rent to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, Dakkota took in \$1.1 billion in sales in 2023, according to outside estimates, and is estimated to have made more than \$745 million so far in 2024. The company is privately held and does not publicly report its financial data.

Andra Rush, the chairwoman of Dakkota, is also a near-billionaire, with a net worth of close to \$981 million. She was hailed by Barack Obama in the 2014 State of the Union speech as an example of the “auto recovery.” This was in fact, a restructuring that involved massive attacks on autoworkers by both Democrats and Republicans.

On the picket line, another striking Dakkota worker reported, “I have not yet received strike pay.” At the same time, UAW president Shawn Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy have donated over

\$1.5 million to the Democratic National Committee and have endorsed the pro-corporate Kamala Harris and Tim Walz for the 2024 US presidential elections. The more than \$1 billion in assets controlled by the UAW bureaucracy, drawn from the dues of rank-and-file workers, have been used to fill the pockets of the officialdom, as they have conspired with management against the interests of workers on the floor for decades.

“We need a worldwide strike”

A veteran Dakkota worker also spoke out against the latest offers brought back by the union and the company.

“I don’t feel like they came back with anything better,” he said. “They were offering the same thing they came to us with. They moved some money around to make it look different.

“It’s a bunch of BS trying to tell us to take a deal that’s unfair. It was said by somebody who I won’t name that ‘This is a fair deal!’ And I said how can you say it’s a fair deal, you haven’t worked the line! We’re far behind the cost of living.”

He also noted that the local leadership had attempted to convince strike captains to promote the latest offer as a “good deal,” which has provoked opposition among striking workers.

“The vast majority are willing to stay strong and stay on the line and not go back. We also have the vast majority of the seniority people in the same mind frame that I am. They all told me that they’re not going for it. I told them exactly what’s going on word for word. If you don’t stand for something, as my mother said, you’ll fall for anything.”

The Dakkota worker was outraged to hear of the recent attack on jobs by Stellantis, which is permanently laying off 2,500 workers at the Warren Truck plant, over two thirds of the workforce. “They’re cutting jobs—unbelievable. After all they fought for. That’s unfair! We need a worldwide strike! But our union leadership is working against us.”

He added, “We need at least \$28-30 an hour to feel like we’re okay to come back. That would be sufficient pay.

“Don’t give in. Stand strong. In the long run, if we persevere, it’s not only going to get better, it’s going to be better to everyone newer and those that come behind you.

“We’re essential. We’re autoworkers. We make this world go around, including for Dakkota and Ford. We make the frames, suspensions, rotors, the control arms, the calipers, brakes in front and back, we make the whole frame—everything! Without us, the cars don’t even move.

“It’s hard coming in and not having a [pay]check to take care of our lives. We can barely take care of ourselves weekly and it’s still not enough. They’ve taken a lot from us, the last contract. It’s time for them to give us back.”

He also appealed to workers at Chicago Assembly who have been forced to accept scab parts by the UAW: “Brothers and sisters at Chicago Assembly, accepting scab parts is a slap in the face to us. I know it’s not your fault. But you need to take action. We appreciate your support. But you have to push more to not accept scab parts too, so we can get better wages.

“Everything is a fight. We got to stand up and you have to stay standing until you get what you’re fighting for.”

Ford Chicago worker: “I support the rank-and-file movement for a ban on scab parts”

There are growing calls at Ford Chicago for a ban on the use of scab parts, which the UAW apparatus has refused to implement, allowing Dakkota to continue supplying Ford with parts made by strikebreakers.

One younger Ford worker told the WSWS, “We’re still getting subframes from the scabs and we’ve had issues with it. I’m not comfortable building with scab labor. I would hate for down the line if there were recalls to come from this, we’d be to blame, or Dakkota employees would be blamed.

“I support the rank-and-file movement for a ban on scab parts,” he added, speaking on the statement by the rank-and-file committees of Ford Chicago and Dakkota workers.

Another veteran Ford worker added, “Of course, me and my coworkers support their fight for benefits and a better wage. I heard the scabs there are walking out because of the working conditions and the low pay they’re getting too.”

He commented on the jobs bloodbath in the auto industry and the attacks on workers, “I’m disgusted that Fain gets on TV and he speaks about Lordstown closing. And now Warren Truck’s laying off thousands of jobs and he’s not even speaking about that. That makes me sick.

“I’m from Michigan. My grandparents worked there. The Monroe plant closed down. I see what it does to families when it closes and I know how hard it gets. Divorces happen. Families split up. Things gets hard. You should see Monroe. The city as a whole took a hit when Ford pulled out.

“The audacity the Democrats have that they’re on the side of the working class is sickening. I’m tired of it.”

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for vice president, expressed his solidarity with the strike in a statement last week, saying, “Dakkota workers are fighting not just for themselves, but for all workers.”

Urging rank-and-file workers to organize independently and broaden the fight, White explained that “the struggle for higher wages must be combined with the defense of the right to a job, as well as the right to adequate time off and a healthy and safe working environment. The rights of the working class must supersede the companies so-called ‘right’ to profit.”

Work at Dakkota, Ford or in the auto industry? Fill out the form below to get involved with the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network at your plant.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact