

Dakkota parts workers' strike at crossroads: "If we don't fight now, then we will never have the opportunity"

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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.

After defying a UAW-company sellout contract vote for an unprecedented fourth time, Dakkota auto parts workers in Chicago are reaching a critical turning point in their fight.

On Monday, workers returned to the picket lines on their own initiative while the UAW bureaucracy has largely gone silent following the explosive meeting on Sunday, when workers shouted down union officials for bringing back yet another sellout deal.

"It's radio silence," a rank-and-file worker told the WSWS. "I don't know what's going on. It's just weird. I feel like this is a scare tactic. I hear that supposedly the strike is going to be stopped next Tuesday. Nobody knows what's going on. We don't know if that's a disinformation tactic. But what I know is that the union reps are very upset about what happened yesterday."

The Dakkota workers on the Far South Side of Chicago have been on strike for over three weeks, courageously defying attempts by the company and the union to force them to accept poverty wages starting at \$16.80 an hour and little more than \$22 for senior workers for this year.

Despite threats of a "last, best and final offer" from the union and the company, Dakkota workers defied three shotgun votes brought back by the UAW in rapid succession last week.

Dakkota workers must take control of the strike

As of this writing, workers have reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that the UAW is continuing to bring back threats from the company of a lockout or of workers losing their jobs.

The strike has now reached a critical juncture, and Dakkota workers must immediately take the initiative to put the strike under their control. Workers at Dakkota have repeatedly come into conflict with the anti-democratic bureaucratic apparatus of Shawn Fain and the UAW, which has acted as little more than agents of the corporations and the government.

Workers must instead build and develop the newly formed Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has been the only strategic voice of the striking workers. Dakkota workers supply critical parts to the assembly of the vehicles at the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, where workers have been told by the UAW to handle scab parts despite widespread opposition among Ford workers there.

Dakkota workers must send delegations to the gates of Ford Chicago

and appeal to the workers to enforce a ban on scab parts. Ford's Chicago plant is one of the oldest operating auto plants in the country and a vital component in Ford's operation.

The expansion of the struggle of Dakkota workers to Ford and the Big Three would have an enormous impact and immediately strengthen the fight of Dakkota workers. Using the just-in-time production model, parts workers are central to the automotive supply chain and the most exploited section of autoworkers. Workers are part of a globally interconnected supply chain that gives them enormous power when workers can link up across different factories, industries and countries.

"I'm not giving up. I'm still fighting."

"If we don't fight now," a Dakkota worker in the newly formed rank-and-file committee spoke of the crucial juncture they are at, "then we will never have the opportunity."

Rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and former UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman appealed to the Dakkota workers today to expand their fight.

"Brothers and sisters," he said, "since the UAW leadership at your local has shut down your Facebook page and said nothing about your strike, I urge you all to elect your own rank-and-file strike leadership. Take a poll, elect a group of trusted people to lead this strike.

"I suggest you all begin to send delegations to Ford Chicago [Assembly Plant, CAP] at shift change. Go and picket outside CAP and talk to workers about not using scab parts. Finally, you should all join the Ford Chicago Facebook page and urge the brothers and sisters there to collectively decide that you refuse to handle scab parts, which hurts your strike."

Another Dakkota worker said of the vote and the aftermath, "I just feel they're selling out. They gave up quickly. So it looks like we could go back to work if they don't decide to lock us out. Honestly I can't tell if it's just threats. One guy said he called the UAW representatives that negotiated the contract. He said Dakkota is not talking to them.

"We all deserve a lot more," she added. "I'm not giving up. I'm still fighting."

"The whole foundation is built on the back of workers"

Workers at Dakkota also continued to speak out against the manner in which the UAW has tried to intimidate them.

“They got us looking at these contracts,” a newer Dakkota worker said, “that you should read the contract and sign it on the same day, which is odd to me. We need more time to process and read through all this and know what benefits and wages that we are owed. We workers are working hard. Without the workers there would be no Dakkota, no Ford, no Tesla.

“The whole foundation is built on the back of workers,” he added. “This whole strike has been so suspicious. The union is bought and paid for, blackmailing us. They’ve tried to shut us up. One of my union people tried to get me to sign the contract. By that time I had already voted ‘No’.”

“They put a gun to our head”

Another worker spoke on Sunday after she left the union hall following the contract vote. “I live in Chicago, the cost of living is horrible. School supplies, gas are all expensive—and you want us to take \$16-17 an hour? There’s no transparency with our union leadership whatsoever. They’re on the other side, and they’re paid under the table. The chairwoman of the company [Andra Rush] is a billionaire.

“Even if you had given us \$25, we could understand that. They took vacation from us. Our benefits are crap. There was no transparency. They don’t really give a crap about us.”

She spoke about the atmosphere inside the union hall. “The inside, everybody was in an uproar. There were people who were struggling, and they needed money with school starting. We didn’t get our strike pay until last week. They said if you continue to strike, they would lock us out indefinitely. They put a gun to our head. That’s a dictatorship to me.”

“They’re making billions from the sweat of workers”

Another newer Dakkota worker said, “There was no clarification why we were at the vote. They wasted our time. They said ‘one vote’ and when we asked what’s the next step? They said it’s a lockout.

“I asked so what’s our options? He couldn’t answer anything. So what are we paying union dues for? You’re taking money out of our checks. What are you fighting for? They’re fighting for the companies, themselves. They’re not fighting for the working people.”

He added, “It’s horrible; we work in the auto industry, and we can’t pay all our bills. We’ve gotta decide if we should pay for lights or gas, your rent or your food. And it shouldn’t be that way. It’s madness there. We had one hour to vote on something we didn’t even know what we were even voting on! We’re tired and fed up, and we want fair wages and equality.

“They’re making billions from the sweat of workers. We’re in there and it’s 90 degrees outside, and it’s 105 degrees inside. And we’re working hard, day in and day out making our numbers. We work, we’re there, even for mandatory overtime. All we want is to be compensated properly. We need to be treated fairly.

“The cost of living is astronomical in Chicago, with rent, childcare, insurance, and a lot of situations we’re faced with. The billionaire boss does not care about us. It’s 2024. Everyone should be paid fair wages. Everything is constantly going up. They’re trying to pay us 20-30 cents? It’s ridiculous.”

Detroit Dakkota workers: “I definitely stand with you in solidarity”

On Monday, a reporting team visited Dakkota workers in Detroit to discuss the rebellion of Chicago Dakkota workers. Dakkota workers in Detroit offered their support and discussed the issues they face.

One worker said of the striking workers in Chicago, “I definitely stand with you in solidarity.”

When asked about the challenges workers face at the plant in Detroit, the worker said, “We’re talking about working conditions and pay. We have way too many safety issues. They don’t really care about our safety. Safety should be number one.

“And that’s not it. It’s more so about a product and production, and it should be our safety should always be number one. That should be our number one goal of keeping us safe and being a safe worker. And if I don’t feel safe, I can’t give you a good product.

“If I’m not able to come home with a decent paycheck every day, for my family,” the worker added, relaying sympathy for striking workers in Chicago, “how do you think I feel as a worker? How do you think you don’t get a good product?”

“I really don’t feel like the UAW really cares too much about us over here, especially here. Yeah, you make six figures off of our dues money. And I don’t get anything from it.”

“They need to support us. We need to support them”

A Stellantis Warren Truck worker in the Detroit area spoke out on the attacks on jobs and the need to have a united fight of autoworkers. “It’s just really frustrating seeing all the layoffs,” the worker said, “and having all this uncertainty, and it’s just kind of where we are right now.”

On the rebellion of Dakkota workers, the worker said, “I think there’s something there. They should be listening to them. There’s a reason for all that. I mean, they have to.

“They’re not listening to us. We’re the ones who build these vehicles. We’re the ones who know the ins and outs. They need to be getting input from us because of how we work closely with these vehicles. But we’re the ones getting the short end of the stick.

“I would just tell them good luck and just know that they have our support,” the worker added, speaking to Dakkota workers.

“They need to support us. We need to support them. We need to all stand against whatever is coming next, because we don’t know. We ask questions every day and nobody knows anything. Yeah, they’ve been hiding it from you, every day. It’s not the first time.”



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