

“The war’s not over”: Dakkota workers seething after UAW rams through contract with threats of lockout

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On Saturday, the United Auto Workers rammed through a concessions-filled contract on striking Dakkota auto parts workers, after forcing them to vote five times under constant threats of lockouts and job losses.

After the workers rejected four previous agreements, the UAW sent out a text message Sunday night saying that 92 percent voted “Yes” this time and 8 percent voted “No.” Last Sunday, workers rejected the deal by 54 percent at an explosive meeting at the union hall. The very first vote on the tentative agreement brought back in early August by the UAW was by 87 percent.

“The UAW sold us out completely,” a Dakkota worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* on Sunday.

At a Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee meeting held Sunday, one worker explained: “The UAW said they would lock us out. They put fear into Dakkota workers. They were rushing to get us back to work there.” He reported that the UAW Local 3212 president tried to “strong arm” workers with threats, which infuriated workers last week. On Thursday, workers were told that anyone who crossed the picket line would be eligible to vote.

“The war’s not over,” the worker said. “This is just the beginning of what’s happening to everyone. This is my first experience on strike, and I’m learning from it.”

A significant section of workers defiantly voted “No” despite the threats from the company and the union. One worker said, “I still voted ‘No’. I do not care. Since the beginning, it was scare tactics. I’m going to walk in there with my head held up high. We lost this battle, but we’ll win the war.”

Another worker speaking to the WSWs denounced the censorship of the workers. “I voted ‘No’,” he said. “I voted ‘Hell no!’ They shut down their UAW 3212 app. They shut down the Facebook page. What type of people do that?”

The latest agreement changed very little from the initial

agreement workers rejected overwhelmingly. New hires would only make \$16.80 to start, barely above Chicago’s minimum wage, and top out at \$18 an hour. Senior workers would make \$1 more than what was initially offered, starting \$22 an hour and ending with \$26.50 in 2027.

Just as at Lear, John Deere, Dana and other companies where workers rejected pro-company contracts, the UAW forced through a vote by the most anti-democratic manner possible from the outset. The UAW in effect has made a practice of forcing workers to vote over and over on identical contracts until they finally “get it right.” Workers described the union’s lack of transparency and attempts to ram through this deal as nothing short of a “dictatorship” throughout this process.

This is a completely illegitimate contract, the outcome of an illegitimate process. Dakkota workers endured constant coercion and intimidation from the UAW officials. They were starved on the picket lines without strike pay for more than two weeks, while being forced to fend for themselves by bringing their own water and picket signs in 90-degree heat.

Throughout the strike, workers seethed against the economic hardship they had to endure and the sellout contracts the UAW kept bringing back. This thrust them into conflict with the pro-company UAW bureaucracy, which has sought to sabotage, isolate and break the strike from the very beginning.

From the outset, the union worked to keep the strike isolated from the wider struggles of autoworkers, including Stellantis Warren Truck workers fighting mass layoffs and the workers at the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly plant, which Dakkota supplies subframes, suspensions and other critical parts. The UAW International under Fain and Local 551 have kept Ford Chicago workers working with scab parts.

But Dakkota workers did seek to break the UAW-imposed isolation and sellouts by fighting to expand the strike. The

workers formed the Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which was the most conscious and strategic voice of the opposition and rebellion of Dakkota workers throughout the strike.

Last Sunday, the rank-and-file committee called for a “No” vote, which was taken up by all the workers at the union hall. On Wednesday, Dakkota workers led a picket outside the Ford plant with a statement calling for a ban on scab parts. Ford workers, who were from the beginning outraged at being forced by the UAW to handle scab parts, were further enraged and spoke out on social media.

While the UAW officials sought to shift the blame onto individual workers crossing the picket line after being starved out for weeks, the real strikebreakers were the UAW apparatus itself.

Shawn Fain, who called Trump a “scab” at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, made a point of not visiting any of the striking workers at the picket lines. He returned to Chicago the following week for a UAW Region 4 conference and continued to maintain a silence on the strike. When workers found out that Fain was in Chicago twice in two weeks while they were on strike, many were angry.

Following the mass layoffs at the Big Three automakers, the betrayal at Dakkota further exposes the lie that the UAW bureaucracy has been “reformed” under new President Shawn Fain or that it is possible to reform it through rank-and-file pressure. Instead, the apparatus must be smashed and replaced with new structures that workers actually control.

The entire media and the political establishment enforced a total information blackout. There was not a single article published by any of the major news media, from the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, or any of the news networks such as ABC, NBC or local radio stations like WBEZ. Workers reported to the WWS that they tried calling various major networks asking them to cover their strike, but not a single one came to the pickets.

The pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America, *Left Voice*, *Labor Notes*, *Jacobin* and the rest have kept radio silence on this critical struggle of hyper-exploited parts workers. At the pseudo-left Socialism 2024 conference, the Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction of the union told WWS reporters Sunday they had not even heard of the Dakkota workers’ strike.

Only the *World Socialist Web Site* has continuously sought to give voice to this important struggle. A Dakkota worker said, “I appreciate all of you for what you did for us. Thank you for everything you all reported throughout. Everything. I learned a lot through this strike.”

“The war’s not over. This is just the beginning.”

Dakkota workers and autoworkers as a whole must draw critical lessons from this experience. The fight is far from over. Workers will confront many problems in the coming weeks and months ahead.

What was revealed in the Dakkota workers’ strike was that a serious fight for decent paying jobs can only develop in the form of a conscious rank-and-file struggle against the UAW bureaucracy, a rebellion in which the central question is the broad unity of workers, not just at an individual plant, but a working class movement against exploitation in general.

The crude thuggishness with which the union bureaucrats responded to workers’ determination reflected their fear that their strike could trigger a broader revolt of the rank and file.

The more Dakkota workers dug in, especially after they appealed to Ford Chicago workers to refuse to handle scab parts, the more the bureaucracy responded ruthlessly to betray the strike.

A jobs bloodbath is starting in the global auto industry as companies shift towards electric vehicles, which require fewer parts. In addition to thousands of job cuts in the US, tens of thousands more are already planned in Italy and throughout Europe.

Already, parts workers are facing job cuts. The Dana parts facility in Lima, Ohio, which has operated for 50 years, is being threatened with closure. Thousands of Dana parts workers faced arbitrary firings last year, with the complicity of the UAW bureaucracy.

Autoworkers everywhere must draw the lessons of the Dakkota strike. The fight for good paying jobs can only take place in a rebellion against the pro-corporate union bureaucracy, uniting workers into a broader movement against capitalist exploitation.



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