

The lessons of the UAW sellout at Dakkota

Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee Network
2 September 2024

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Brothers and sisters,

On Tuesday, Dakkota auto parts workers in Chicago will be returning to work, after the United Auto Workers bureaucracy rammed through its sellout contract over the weekend, shutting down our nearly month-long strike.

There is absolutely nothing legitimate about UAW Local 3212's claims that their deal was "ratified" by 92 percent Saturday.

The contract imposes wages for new hires starting at \$16.80 an hour, barely above Chicago's minimum wage. The \$22 an hour for senior workers, rising to \$26.70 in 2027, does not keep up with inflation and is also a poverty wage, meaning that we will continue to be forced to work two or three jobs just to pay the bills.

Many workers may be unfamiliar with our struggle, since the UAW and the media maintained a near-total blackout on it. It is therefore necessary to briefly review what took place.

Union officials refused to accept four consecutive contract rejections by Dakkota workers over the course of August. They made us vote again and again on essentially the same agreement—three times in one week!—strong-arming us until they got the result the company wanted. The UAW apparatus starved us on the picket line and withheld information from us, never even showing us the full contract, despite our repeated demands for it.

The UAW headquarters also kept the full membership completely in the dark on our struggle, in an effort to isolate us from workers at Stellantis, where UAW President Shawn Fain is falsely claiming to be carrying out a fight against mass layoffs.

The union bureaucracy was also frightened that our rebellion would encourage workers at other parts companies. On Friday, UAW Local 1216 suddenly announced a tentative agreement at Ventra (owned by Flex-N-Gate) in Sandusky, Ohio, blocking a strike scheduled to begin on September 1. Workers there are similarly fed up with their extreme exploitation.

On behalf of the company, UAW officials also threatened us with a lockout and the loss of our jobs if we did not submit to their "last, best and final offer," while encouraging those who had crossed the picket line to vote to get the deal through.

Worst of all, the UAW ordered Ford Chicago workers to handle the parts made by scabs Dakkota had hired, even though there was widespread support among Ford workers for a ban on scab parts. Last week, Dakkota and Ford workers held an informational picket together at Chicago Assembly urgently appealing for workers at the plant to collectively refuse to handle the parts, which found a strong response.

It was out of fear that Ford Chicago workers would take matters into their own hands that the UAW pulled out all the stops to ram the contract through last weekend.

Now that they have betrayed our strike, UAW officials are already trying to pass the blame onto the workers who crossed the picket line. But the UAW apparatus is responsible for putting workers into that position with inadequate and delayed strike pay, and poverty wages under the previous contract. They all but openly told workers to return to work while the strike was still going on.

The real strikebreakers are the UAW bureaucrats who never missed a paycheck during the strike and drive around in new Cadillacs telling us we have no choice but to do what the company wants.

The broader context of our struggle

Workers throughout the auto industry are confronting a jobs bloodbath and cost-cutting race, with the union bureaucracies in each country acting as enforcers for the corporations. The effort by Dakkota (and behind it, Ford) to keep our wages low is part of that process.

Stellantis has announced it is planning to permanently cut 2,450 jobs at its Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit, has said it is delaying plans to begin reopening facilities at Belvidere Assembly this year and is threatening 25,000 auto and auto parts jobs in Italy. Another parts supplier, Dana, just announced it is planning to close its plant in Lima, Ohio, and reportedly just closed its factory in St. Clair, Michigan.

All the major auto corporations are cutting thousands of jobs around the world, from the US, to Germany and Italy and even China. They are in a cutthroat competition over electric vehicle markets and are attempting to keep enriching their investors

with billions in profits, which are created by the labor of autoworkers throughout the global supply chain.

The UAW and the media claimed that last year's "stand-up strikes" at the Big Three resulted in "historic" contracts. But that struggle was also sold out by Fain and the bureaucracy, just like ours, part of an unbroken record of betrayals by the UAW. The stand-up strikes were deliberately ineffective and kept the majority of workers on the job, and the contracts gave the companies a green light to lay off or fire thousands of workers.

Draw the lessons: Build the network of rank-and-file committees!

Despite the betrayal of our strike, we will be coming back to work with our heads held high Tuesday. Dakkota workers took a stand and fought for our rights and the rights of all workers.

We wish to express our appreciation to the *World Socialist Web Site*, which did more to inform us in a single article than the UAW did throughout the whole process. The WSWS was the only publication that reported truthful information about our strike, counteracting the near-total blackout by the media and the UAW.

The battle for our basic rights is far from over. Now that the strike has been shut down, the company will seek to speed up production and sweat us out in overtime, as will Ford. And while Ford has stated it is slowing down its EV plans for now in response to slower-than-expected demand, auto industry analysts have repeatedly stated that the EV transition places the future of the Chicago Assembly plant in doubt, threatening thousands of jobs throughout the area.

The corporations, assisted by the union bureaucrats, will keep ramping up their attacks until workers finally put a stop to them. We believe that the following conclusions must be drawn by autoworkers everywhere from the experience of our strike:

- **The UAW bureaucracy represents the corporations, not the workers**, and that is just as much the case under President Shawn Fain as it was under Ray Curry. Fain was twice in Chicago during our strike to promote Harris and the Democrats, while turning a deaf ear to our appeals. Our struggle demonstrated again that the UAW apparatus acts as agents of both big business and their political parties, not the workers.

It should be noted that autoworkers will be bombarded with campaign ads from the UAW over the next two months claiming that it is necessary to vote for Harris to defend democracy, but the reality is that workers within the UAW are deprived of basic democratic rights, including the right to vote and have it count.

- **Workers need collective organizations which genuinely represent our interests.** The Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee was formed because we as workers saw that the

UAW officials were working for the other side. Our committee issued demands based on what workers actually needed, including a 50 percent wage increase, and fought for a strategy to expand and win the strike. On the other hand, the UAW officials largely hid from us while plotting behind the scenes with the company.

We urge workers at Dakkota to join and build our rank-and-file committee, and to help us expand the network of committees at Ford and throughout its suppliers at Lear, Flex-N-Gate and others. The Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee also endorses the call by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) for new UAW elections, this time overseen by workers themselves.

Workers must expand the struggles beyond a single plant or company in order for the next battles to be successful. Our struggle showed that workers cannot win against giant corporations if their struggles remain isolated.

Dakkota workers were fighting not just against one particularly greedy company. Behind Dakkota was Ford Motor Company and its big investors on Wall Street. To beat these giant corporations, workers must have an international strategy and organizations of our own.

While the UAW's betrayal of our strike was particularly shameless, our experience at Dakkota is not fundamentally unique. Again and again, rank-and-file workers are rebelling against pro-company contracts pushed by the union bureaucracies, from John Deere and Mack and Volvo Trucks, to airline and railroad workers and others.

Inequality is reaching nearly unimaginable proportions. Society is divided on one side between a corporate and financial aristocracy with fortunes reaching the hundreds of billions, and on the other side, a working class which comprises the vast majority of the population and is faced with a daily struggle to survive and put food on the table.

The rebellion at Dakkota is the latest sign that workers are reaching a breaking point, and that many have little to nothing left to lose. The urgent task now facing workers everywhere is to build a powerful rank-and-file movement which unites this opposition and fights to assert the will and interests of the working class.

Make the decision to get involved in the fight back: Join the Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee or a rank-and-file committee wherever it is you work.



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