

Striking BorgWarner auto parts workers vote down second Teamsters-backed sellout deal

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Work at BorgWarner? Fill out the form at the end to tell us what you think of the last two contract offers, and what workers are fighting for.

Nearly 800 auto parts workers affiliated with the Teamsters union at BorgWarner in Lansing, New York, are on strike following the expiration of their previous contract on September 8. BorgWarner workers produce parts utilized by most major auto companies worldwide.

The workers walked out September 9 after voting by an overwhelming 88 percent to reject a proposal that BorgWarner had called its “last, best, and final offer.” Workers had earlier approved a strike by 98 percent. There were very few details released concerning the first TA, mainly due to a non-disclosure gag order imposed on workers by the prior sellout contract.

The workers are fighting for better pay, benefits, and working conditions after enduring years of cuts to buying power as costs have risen, and sellout contracts have been imposed upon them.

Late last week, Teamsters Local 317 announced a second contract offer, endorsing it and rushing it to a vote. Workers, however, again overwhelmingly voted to reject the offer, with 67 percent against it. The Teamsters bureaucrats had sought to limit the duration of the strike by leaving workers no time to seriously review the fine print of the second TA, which included a paltry 28 percent wage increase over a four-year term.

Workers at BorgWarner have taken a courageous stand by rejecting the Teamsters’ pro-company deal. But the union apparatus—far from seeking to “negotiate” a better contract—will only deepen its efforts to betray the strike. The Teamsters bureaucracy has sold out one struggle after another in recent years, working to block strikes both among railroad workers in 2022 and UPS workers in 2023.

To win their fight, workers at BorgWarner should seize the initiative and organize rank-and-file committees to

take control of the strike. Such a committee would provide a means for workers to draw up a list of demands based on their actual needs, such as a 50 percent wage increase.

The strike and contract rejections at BorgWarner are part of an emerging rebellion in the working class against attacks on jobs and wages, which are being carried out with the support of the pro-corporate union bureaucracies.

Last week, 33,000 Boeing machinists launched their first strike since 2008 after voting by a massive 95 percent to reject a contract backed by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy. In the auto industry, parts workers at Dakota Integrated Systems in Chicago voted down four sellout contracts with poverty wages before a virtually identical fifth deal was rammed through by the United Auto Workers apparatus last month.

Support staff were also recently on strike at Cornell University in nearby Ithaca, New York, and are affiliated with UAW Local 2300. The strike began on August 18, and the UAW announced that a tentative agreement was ratified on September 9. The agreement’s details included below-inflation wage rises of up to 25.4 percent spread over four years, only 6.35 percent annually. Inflation is estimated to have increased consumer costs by 21.2 percent since January 2020, however, effectively eating up most of the increases in the agreement.

Responding to reports of Teamsters President Sean O’Brien making a photo-op appearance on the picket line, BorgWarner worker Bill White denounced the substandard second TA being pushed onto workers by the bureaucracy, telling the *Ithaca Times*, “We all think they brought him in to show Teamsters leadership strength and to coerce us to accept an unacceptable offer. Well, us employees said no.”

WSWS reporters spoke to workers at a previous visit to

the Lansing plant, who stated that because workers were not satisfied with the contracts obtained by their previous union, the UAW, they had voted to switch and join the Teamsters.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's US vice presidential candidate, issued a statement supporting the strike and placing it in the context of the global attacks on autoworkers' jobs:

As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for vice president, I support the strike by BorgWarner workers in Lansing, NY. Throughout the global auto industry, workers are facing an escalating attack on their jobs and living standards, including the threat to cut 2,500 jobs at Stellantis in Detroit and 12,000 in Italy and thousands of VW jobs in Germany and other European countries.

The global auto bosses want to force workers to pay for the EV transition, and the union bureaucracies act as their accomplices. In Chicago, Dakota workers courageously stood up to UAW President Shawn Fain and the UAW bureaucracy, which forced them to vote five times on the same pro-company contract.

To win your struggle, you must take the fight out of the hands of the Teamsters bureaucracy and build a rank-and-file strike committee to outline your non-negotiable demands for inflation-busting raises and the right to a secure and good-paying job.

BorgWarner is a transnational corporation based in Auburn Hills, Michigan, with 92 facilities in 24 countries employing 52,000 workers, and revenue of \$14.2 billion in 2023. The largest shareholders are giant investment firms such as Vanguard Group.

BorgWarner CEO Frederic Lissalde was paid \$19.3 million in 2023, a ratio of 490 times more than median worker pay. The job website Indeed.com listed \$18.22 per hour as the starting wage rate for production workers at the Lansing BorgWarner plant.

The company plans to move a valvetrain production line to Mexico to take advantage of cheaper labor costs, eliminating some 300 positions in Lansing. The decision was announced in the lead-up to contract negotiations and is scheduled for 2026.

Both the UAW and Teamsters bureaucracies have

responded to the attacks on jobs in the auto and logistics industries by seeking to whip up "Buy American" nationalism and reactionary anti-Mexican sentiment. But the transnational corporations are waging an assault on workers globally, and it is only with an international strategy of their own—and the rejection of nationalist divisions promoted by the ruling class—that workers can effectively fight back.

The second TA included a one-time \$5,500 sign-on bonus, which is a double-dealing tactic designed to break down solidarity among workers, but ultimately a benefit to large shareholders who would see lower labor costs over the term agreement due to the sub-inflation annual wage raises.

The non-profit United For ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Essentials Index published this past June stated, "While wages have risen substantially in recent years, so have costs. And even in occupations where wages are growing faster than costs, wages started from such a low level that many workers are still not able to cover household essentials."

From 2021-2023, the ALICE report projects a 7.3 percent inflation rate compared to the US Consumer Price Index figure of 6.1 percent. This is nothing that will surprise most workers who have lost significant ground as they were locked in sub-inflation contracts.

Moreover, the ALICE index found that between 2007 and 2013, housing costs increased 76 percent, childcare 57 percent, groceries 37 percent, transportation 66 percent, healthcare 75 percent, and technology between 2016 and 2023 by 55 percent.

In addition, workers have been hammered by unrelenting healthcare cost increases such as health insurance, which have eaten up and exceeded decades of meager pay increases.

For a real struggle to be waged at BorgWarner for workers' basic interests, it is necessary to take control out of the hands of the trade union apparatus through the formation of rank-and-file committees, and to link up with autoworkers, striking Boeing workers, and other sections of workers.



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