

Teamsters union shuts down BorgWarner auto parts strike with third vote on sellout agreement

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On Saturday, the Teamsters union forced the end of a strike by BorgWarner auto parts workers in Lansing, New York.

The new agreement was ratified only under duress, after the company shut off workers' health insurance last Tuesday. It is the third agreement which the Teamsters officials brought to a vote, following two earlier sellout deals which workers overwhelmingly rejected.

This is similar to the recent strike in Chicago by Dakkota parts workers, who were forced to vote five times on virtually identical deals by the United Auto Workers. In response, workers formed a rank-and-file committee to take the strike out of the bureaucracy's hands.

The Teamsters bureaucrats were determined to isolate the strike under conditions of growing anger against job cuts and poverty pay across the auto industry. Thousands of autoworkers have lost their jobs so far this year, but this is a down payment for hundreds of thousands of jobs which are in the crosshairs for the coming years as part of the switch to electric vehicles.

Moreover, a growing strike movement is underway in the US, shown by the strike by 33,000 Boeing workers on the West Coast. At the end of the month, a strike deadline expires for tens of thousands of East Coast and Gulf Coast dockworkers.

The new four-year deal at BorgWarner includes a \$5,500 signing bonus paid out in installments, as well as inadequate wage increases of 6, 5, 5 and 5 percent in each successive year. It also included a bribe of four days additional vacation for workers with 25 years seniority and over, in an effort to try to divide older workers against younger workers.

News that the deal had been reached broke Wednesday, with a vote taking place only three days later. This did not give workers adequate time to study the agreement outside of one-sided "highlights" presented by the apparatus.

Having failed to secure ratification of the first two deals, the Teamsters apparatus decided to soften up workers on the picket line. A veteran BorgWarner worker said, "At this point in the strike I have no money to put in my gas tank," adding further, "This has to stop, and these corporations need a wake-up call. I was very disappointed in both BorgWarner and Union leadership.

The veteran worker continued, "Mexico is held to our heads like a weapon and used to force us into bad contract after bad contract with the constant threat of closing entirely if we don't allow ourselves to be stepped on and have basic benefits taken piece by piece.

"Each contract cycle, the company takes away a little more of our time that has been earned over decades by previous contract battles, and our union leadership has encouraged us to let these benefits be taken away. Our medical insurance covers very little now, and when I started there was no point system."

John Cometti, business agent for Teamsters Local 317, shed crocodile tears to the *Ithaca Voice* after workers' health insurance was cut off. "That's huge for an individual to be courageous enough to know that they possibly can be replaced and lose their healthcare for their family; it brings tears to my eyes, that dedication."

The bureaucrats inhabit a world far closer to management than workers. Last year, Cometti's total

compensation from the Teamsters was \$116,181, while the local's Secretary-Treasurer Duane Wright raked in \$146,155. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien made \$421,390. By contrast, starting production workers have a poverty annual wage of \$37,898.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)'s living wage calculator, a family of four with one person working would need \$91,624 a year.

Meanwhile, layoffs are taking place throughout the area. Recently, transnational corporation Cargill announced layoffs of 25 workers at the Lansing underground salt mine. The company is the largest privately held concern within the US, with a revenue of \$165 billion in 2022.

BorgWarner workers must draw the lessons of this betrayal in preparing for the next phase of the struggle. The bureaucracy cannot be pressured into fighting for workers; it must be overthrown and replaced with new structures workers actually control.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build new organs of workers' power. It includes workers across the auto industry worldwide, including both the US and in Europe, as well as Boeing workers, railroaders, teachers and other sections of the working class.



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