

# “We make all the money, they take it”: Eaton workers discuss sellout of dock strike

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Five hundred and twenty-five workers at Eaton Aerospace in Jackson, Michigan, have begun their fourth week on strike. The strike began on September 16 after rank-and-file workers rejected two contract proposals backed by United Auto Workers Local 475 officials.

Workers are opposing attacks on pensions, high out-of-pocket healthcare costs for current and retired workers and the threat to create a second tier of workers with substandard pay and benefits. Workers at the factory produce components used by defense and commercial aircraft manufacturers, including Boeing where 33,000 workers are currently on strike.

On September 28, a young Eaton worker, Seth Webb, was killed and several other workers were injured when a vehicle involved in a street race near the factory lost control and crashed into a group of striking workers. Kyle Alger, 29, and Aaron Fraser, 27, were critically injured.

Workers spoke highly of the young worker, telling WSWS reporters, “We both knew him, although he was in a different department. He was a really nice kid, just 24 years old. It was really sad. I don’t know what the status is of the other two workers.”

More than \$84,000 has been raised on GoFundMe pages set up by family members and co-workers to help pay funeral and medical expenses for three families. (Webb GoFundMe. Alger GoFundMe. Fraser GoFundMe)

The tragedy would never have happened if the multi-billion corporation did not provoke the strike. However, the isolation of the struggle by the UAW bureaucracy has left these workers in greater danger.

The conditions to unite Eaton workers are rapidly emerging, but strikers have to organize their own rank-and-file strike committee to break the isolation of the strike.

Later this month, 150 Eaton Aerospace workers in Fareham, Hants, in the south of England, are set to strike on October 16 to demand a one-year pay increase to bring them up to UK averages. The top skilled rate at the Fareham plant is just £32,500 (\$42,648) a year, whereas average UK wages are £35,700 (\$46,844), according to the union Unite. The

company is only offering workers a 10.5 percent raise over three years.

Although fitters, technicians, supervisors and other staff voted overwhelmingly for strike action, the Unite bureaucracy is restricting action to limited strikes which will be staggered between October 16–19, October 21–26, October 29–November 1, November 4–9 and November 11–16.

Another 200 workers at Monogram Aerospace Fasteners (MAF), which produces parts for Boeing and rival Airbus, have been on strike in the Los Angeles suburb of Commerce, California, for two months. Like Eaton workers in Michigan, they voted down two tentative agreements brought back by UAW Local 509.

Striking Eaton workers are closely following the Boeing strike and had been inspired by the powerful walkout of 45,000 East and Gulf Coast dockworkers that started last week. The strike was abruptly shut down by the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) bureaucracy, which worked closely with the Biden-Harris administration to crush the struggle before it affected the shipment of weapons and other equipment to Israel, Ukraine and US military forces preparing for war with Iran and Russia.

Reporters from *World Socialist Web Site* who visited the picket line in Jackson discussed the WSWS article “Betrayal on the docks” with workers. The statement calls for uniting workers at Boeing, Eaton and other struggles against the pro-corporate union bureaucracies through the building of rank-and-file committees to fight for workers’ own demands.

“Boeing is working with a federal mediator,” one striking worker commented, adding, “It’s like all you had to do is provide what workers need. They are raising prices but don’t raise wages to match that.”

“Now, they’re hiring scabs bussing them in and housing them, rather than meeting our demands. Then the media does a good job in dividing us.”

Another worker stated, “We’re making these corporations billions of dollars, and yet we have to come out here and beg

for a livable wage.” After reading about the betrayal by the ILA bureaucracy, he said, “Thank you for bringing this to us. I heard about it but didn’t know the full details. I was glad to see more people striking. It’s a shame that they forced this on those workers.”

In response to the call for rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor, he said, “I think that’s a great idea, as more workers are coming out to strike, we can build our numbers and work together to shut stuff down until we get what we are owed.”

His coworker spoke about the sellout of the dock strike, saying, “I got a message on Facebook about this. I’m not a Biden fan. If Biden is connected to this, I know it’s not good.

“With our contract, all the union is saying is Eaton is ready to talk, but on their terms. But there’s no movement. The last agreement we rejected was a little better than the first, but it wasn’t great. With company-paid pensions, Eaton has already said they want it gone. That’s terrible. I don’t like 401(k) at all! The vice president of the local told us that Eaton wants to starve us so it’ll be a while.”

He continued: “We get \$500 in strike pay; with taxes we get hit then. I’m wondering if I should get another job until this is over. There’s quite a few of them (newer-tier workers) that are trying to find other jobs. Some of them are going to 7-11, Dollar General and things like that just to fill in.”

Her coworker drew out the political and economic issues of the strike at Eaton. “This is my first time being involved in a strike. We rejected three TAs last time. I think about the rich getting richer. I do think about being humble and accepting what they offer, expecting a trickle-down effect. Because it doesn’t really trickle down. They give you a raise and take it out of medical and raise the costs up there. It’s not a ‘win-win’ thing. I was talking to my daughter about why they aren’t taking care of us. We make all the money, they take it!”

Workers at Eaton, like their coworkers at Boeing, the docks and the auto plants, are in the same multi-front war: against the corporations, both big business parties and the union bureaucracy. Workers have experienced the bipartisan outlawing of the 2022 rail strike, the bogus “stand up” strike by the UAW bureaucracy, which has led to contract that has green-lighted a jobs massacre, and now the betrayal of the dock strike.

In recent weeks, UAW President Shawn Fain has floated the possibility that the union would call a strike against Stellantis job cuts. But last week, he made it clear this was nothing but hot air, telling Jerry White, the WSWS labor editor and the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for vice

president that the union first had to “follow the process” and go through a long, drawn-out grievance procedure because striking now could lead to lawsuits from the company. This cowardly statement was made just days before Stellantis throws more than 2,400 workers at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant out of their jobs on October 8.

Workers at Eaton should take this as a sharp warning. Fain is no champion of the working class. He is supporting Harris, a warmonger who supported the outlawing of the 2022 railroad strike, for president. Trump and the Republicans are no alternative. Trump’s counterpart, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, threatened to deploy the National Guard to the Florida ports to break up the strike, hypocritically claiming striking workers were interfering with relief efforts for Hurricane Helene.

In opposition to Fain, the Democrats and Republicans, workers must unite with their coworkers throughout the working class. The information blackout and isolation of their strike must be broken by building rank-and-file strike committees, which will establish lines of communication with workers in other struggles, and outline the non-negotiable demands that workers insist on and outline a strategy to win them.

In creating these committees workers must raise their own independent demands, including:

- End the information blackout by the UAW bureaucracy. All negotiations must be livestreamed and overseen by rank-and-file workers.
- Increase strike pay to at least \$750 a week for all workers. The \$820 million strike fund, financed by the dues of the rank and file, must be used to sustain workers for this critical battle, not fund the lavish lifestyles of the UAW bureaucrats.
- Restore fully paid pensions and medical benefits for all workers and retirees. Not to management-dictated tiers.



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