

UAW bureaucracy betrays eight-week strike by Michigan Eaton Aerospace workers

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15 November 2024

After two months on strike, 525 Eaton Aerospace workers in Jackson, Michigan voted Wednesday on a fourth contract proposal brought back by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy. The proposal was almost identical to the three previous ones that had been overwhelmingly rejected previously. UAW Local 475 officials claimed the deal passed by 90 percent.

Even if that figure was the case, workers only ratified the sellout deal reluctantly. For 61 days, Eaton workers courageously defied both the giant transnational corporation and the treachery of the UAW bureaucracy, which did nothing to oppose the company's strikebreaking threats. But after being left isolated on the picket lines and kept on starvation rations of \$500 a week in UAW strike benefits, Eaton workers felt they had no choice but to accept the deal.

As of this writing, the current agreement reportedly includes a lump sum signing bonus of \$4,500, 17 percent raise over four years of the contract, a shift premium from \$0.75 to \$1, and "probationary" tier wage from \$15 to \$16.50 an hour.

After workers rejected the company's "last, best and final offer" in late October, Eaton announced that it had already begun hiring replacements for the striking workers. The company then gave workers an ultimatum: either vote for the deal and keep your jobs or scab replacements would start working by November 18.

In the face of this blackmail, the UAW bureaucrats joined with management in ramming through the deal.

In comments to a local Fox 47 News reporter, UAW Local 475 President Donnie Huffman claimed workers "lacked leverage for a better offer" and expressed hope workers would pass the deal. "We're one facility in their global conglomerate, and we can't shut down like the Big Three does."

What a fraud.

First, the UAW bureaucracy never "shut down" the Big Three. UAW President Shawn Fain defied the near unanimous demands by rank-and-file workers for an all-out strike by all 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers in September 2023. Instead, he carried out a bogus "stand up strike," which never involved more than a third of the Big Three workers while the rest were forced to stay on the job producing profits for the corporations. In the end, Fain rammed through a supposedly "historic" agreement, which has paved the way for mass job cuts.

As for not having "leverage." The UAW has hundreds of thousands of members in Michigan and nearby states. In Detroit, Toledo and Kokomo, thousands of workers are angry and ready to fight against mass layoffs by Stellantis, GM and Ford. In addition, throughout most of the strike, 33,000 Boeing workers were waging a powerful strike after voting down two contracts backed by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy.

Moreover, the efforts of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to bring news of the Jackson strike to Eaton workers striking in the United Kingdom, demonstrated what could be done if the UAW's vast resources were used for the interest of the rank and file, not the union apparatus.

But the last thing UAW President Shawn Fain wanted was an explosion of class struggle in Michigan, which would have further exposed the Democratic Party as a tool of the corporations, even as the UAW and AFL-CIO bureaucrats were pulling out all the stops and spending millions of dollars to get out the vote for Kamala Harris.

In the end, however, the gross indifference of Harris

and the Democrats to job cuts, plunging living standards and growing economic desperation of workers allowed Trump to pose as a friend of workers and win the election.

Fain and the union officialdom never wanted the strike in the first place. They kept workers on the job after the contract expiration despite the rejection of two UAW-backed deals, which addressed none of workers' demands to continue pensions for current and new hires, the opposition to Eaton's creation of a second tier, increasing healthcare costs for current workers and retirees, as well as the unsafe conditions.

When Eaton worker Seth Webb was killed on September 28, after a truck involved in a street race lost control—killing him and injuring several workers—Fain issued nothing but a perfunctory statement. Throughout the two-month strike, the UAW bureaucracy did nothing to inform other members about the Eaton struggle. Most workers in Detroit, Lansing, Toledo, Kokomo and other auto centers largely learned about the struggle through the efforts of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The WSWS also campaigned for rank-and-file workers in the auto plants, at Boeing and other locations to break the isolation of the strike by the UAW bureaucracy, to prepare joint strike action to stop the strikebreaking and win the struggle.

At the same time, the WSWS urged Eaton workers to throw out the discredited bargaining committee and elect a committee made up of the most trusted militants who would fight for workers' non-negotiable demands.

As one worker told the WSWS during the third TA vote, "The contract is crap. What was the point of being on strike all this time if we go back now without gaining anything? Why did my friend Seth lose his life?"

Despite the contract being ratified, the fight of Eaton workers is not over. At Boeing, the sellout of the strike by the IAM bureaucracy, is being followed by a jobs massacre that is expanding beyond the elimination of 17,000 salaried workers to include production workers as well. There is no doubt that Eaton intends to force workers to pay for whatever marginal increases in labor costs the company incurs in the new contract through an assault on jobs and working conditions. Eaton workers should take a warning from the announcement by CNH Industries, that it intends to close its backhoe

manufacturing facility in Burlington, Ohio unless the UAW reopens the contract and imposes more concessions on workers. This follows the UAW bureaucracy's betrayal of an eight-month strike in Burlington and Racine, Wisconsin in 2022.

Job cuts are accelerating in aerospace and auto industries around the world, with tens of thousands of layoffs at Airbus, VW, Stellantis and other corporations in Italy, France, the UK, China and elsewhere.

This jobs massacre will combine with the historic attack on social and democratic rights by the incoming Trump administration, which is putting together a cabinet of fascists to wage war on the working class at home as it expands American imperialism's wars abroad.

To prepare for the coming battles, workers must reject the pro-capitalist and nationalist outlook of the UAW bureaucracy and both corporate-controlled political parties, and unify with workers around the world in a common struggle against unemployment, poverty, dictatorship and war.

We urge Eaton workers to draw the lessons of their struggle and make the decision to join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and its global campaign to defend the jobs and living standards of workers on every continent.

To join the fight to build rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, fill out the form below.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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