

Detroit Axle workers ready to walk out as strike deadline approaches

Jerry White
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Detroit Axle workers at the Daimler Trucks North America manufacturing complex in suburban Detroit are ready to walk out when their five-year agreement expires at 11:59 pm Friday, January 24. Workers voted by 99 percent last week to authorize a strike and are determined to win substantial pay increases, cost-of-living protections and better retirement benefits.

The 500 Detroit Axle workers also want equal wages with the 1,500 Detroit Diesel workers who produce engines, integrated powertrains and emission systems at the same manufacturing complex in Redford, Michigan. Although both sections of workers are members of United Auto Workers Local 163, there is a separate labor agreement at Detroit Axle with wages that can be \$10 an hour lower, if not more.

“We’re ready to strike for more money and better pensions,” John, a worker with two years in the factory told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “We’re going to strike tomorrow, if they don’t give us what we want,” a younger worker declared.

“We want wage balance on both sides of the plant,” Alan, a worker with seven years added. “We’re tired of them making all the money while we do all the work. This was echoed by a skilled trades worker with three years in the plant, who said, “The biggest issues for us are financial and how much we are behind the diesel engine side of the plant. The skilled trades are also set up differently. On our side all the trades are combined, and they can make you do anything. That needs to change.”

Opposed to any last-minute efforts by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy to keep workers on the job past the deadline, one worker with 10 years in the plant told the WSW, “We won’t accept a contract extension. When the contract expires, we want to walk out.”

The giant transnational corporation has more than enough resources to meet workers’ demands. In 2023, Daimler Truck Holding AG reported a net profit of \$3.93 billion, up 42 percent from the previous year, and \$2.35 billion in the first three quarters of 2024. In addition, the company received more than \$30 million in grants and tax cuts from the state of Michigan to expand the Detroit manufacturing complex.

The workers at the complex produce critical components for several of Daimler Trucks’ major commercial vehicle brands, including Freightliner and Western Star trucks, and Thomas Built school buses. Freightliner workers in Cleveland, North Carolina, who have suffered their own concessions at the hands of the Daimler Trucks and the UAW bureaucracy, sent messages to Detroit Axle workers pledging support for their strike.

Rank-and-file workers must be on guard against any efforts by UAW International and Local 163 officials to defy their strike vote and either announce an extension or a last-minute deal. This is exactly what happened in April-May 2022, when UAW bureaucrats ignored the 98 percent strike vote by Detroit Diesel workers and suddenly announced a deal just before the deadline. Rank-and-file workers, however, voted by 79 percent to reject the sellout deal, which including raises that did nothing to offset the impact of decades high inflation and continued the hated two-tier wage system.

The UAW president at the time, Ray Curry, refused to call a strike, and weeks later rammed through a deal that was virtually no different than the one that workers rejected. Even as he was selling out the struggle, Curry was collecting his salary as a member of the Daimler Benz supervisory board.

Despite the slick videos on Detroit Axle coming out of the UAW’s Communications Department, UAW

President Shawn Fain is no less a pro-company stooge than Curry. In 2023, he oversaw the sellout of the contract battle at GM, Ford and Stellantis opening the door for massive job cuts. After colluding with the Biden administration, Fain is now cozying up to Trump. The last thing the UAW bureaucracy wants is a growing wave of militant strikes that would interfere with its efforts to work with Trump's government of fascists and corporate oligarchs.

But last week's strike vote was not a suggestion, it was a mandate by the membership for a walkout when the deadline expires. The rank and file must enforce the principle of "No contract, No work!" And, if workers strike, they must have a strategy to win.

The precondition for any fight is that it must be controlled by the rank and file who do the work and pay the dues, not union bureaucrats. This means building a rank-and-file committee composed of the most trusted and militant workers who will not bow to the pressure of the UAW bureaucracy and their corporate masters.

This committee must unite all axle, diesel and transmission workers for an all-out strike to shut down the whole Detroit Manufacturing Plant.

The rank-and-file committee should outline the non-negotiable demands of the members, based on what workers need and want, not what management and the UAW bureaucrats say is "realistic."

This includes:

- An immediate \$10 an hour across-the-board increase
- For equal wages with the Detroit Diesel workers
- Fully indexed cost-of-living raises
- Eliminate the divisive two-tier wage structure and temp work
- Restore all pensions
- No layoffs. Secure real job security

The rank-and-file committee must oversee all negotiations and provide workers with the information they need to conduct this fight. No closed door talks and behind the scenes deals!

At the same time workers need the resources to fight this transnational corporation. Strike pay must be raised to \$1,000 a week. The UAW's \$825 million strike fund, which is funded by workers' dues, belongs to the rank and file not the union functionaries.

Mass meetings and protests should be organized with

Big Three and auto parts workers throughout the metro Detroit area. Workers must demand a ban on the handling of scab parts by UAW members at all Daimler-brand truck and school bus plants. A special appeal should be made to Daimler, Mercedes, VW and other autoworkers in Germany and throughout Europe who are facing massive job cuts.

The determination of Detroit Axle workers expresses the growing mood of militancy among workers across the US. It takes place as 5,000 nurses, doctors and midwives in Oregon are conducting the largest strike in the state's history. Another 18,000 Costco workers are set to strike when their contract expires on January 31 in California, Washington, New York, Maryland and Michigan.

These struggles are only the beginning. The Trump administration is now targeting immigrant workers, the most vulnerable section of the working class, but this government intends to strip all workers of their democratic rights and subjugate them to dictates of the mega-billionaires. This includes gutting Social Security, Medicare and other vital programs to fund more tax cuts for the rich and wars to seize resources and annex territories.

This will provoke mass opposition from the working class. But these struggles require organization and leadership. At the same time, giant global corporations like Daimler Trucks, backed to the hilt by both big business parties, can only be fought by uniting workers across national borders. For that reason Daimler Trucks workers should join and expand the work of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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