

After strike vote against wage-cutting demands

IAM agrees to contract extension at New York Air Brake

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International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 761 agreed last week to extend the current contract with New York Air Brake in Watertown, New York for two weeks and continue negotiations after workers voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike against the company's wage-cutting demands.

The union agreed to a news blackout of the talks. It has taken no serious steps to build broader support for the workers, who are outraged over the company's sweeping concessions demands.

The plant, which manufactures brake parts for the railroad industry, employs 151 machinists. Watertown, a town of 27,000 in northern New York near the Canadian border, has an unemployment rate of 11.5 percent. In an effort to blackmail the workers into accepting wage cuts and other give-backs, the company has hinted at closing down the Watertown facility and moving production elsewhere.

New York Brake is demanding wage cuts of up to \$4.15 an hour for workers whose pay averages \$20.88. It is also proposing to end its company-funded pension plan and replace it with a 401(K) plan, increase workers' outlays for medical coverage, eliminate some paid holidays, gut seniority rules, and increase the portion of temporary workers to 25 percent of the workforce.

The company is proposing to institute an incentive payment plan that it claims will compensate for the proposed wage cuts—a claim that is rejected by the IAM and disbelieved by the workers.

The unbridgeable chasm between the New York Brake workers and the IAM bureaucracy is indicated by the pay of top officials of the international union. President Thomas Buffenbarger took in over \$300,000

last year, and the top ten union officials all made over a quarter of a million dollars, according to the union's annual report filed with the US Department of Labor.



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