

Daimler Trucks uses strikebreakers at Portland, Oregon plant

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16 July 2013

In a provocative attack on strikers and their jobs, Daimler Trucks North America (DTNA) brought in six vanloads of scabs Monday morning to replace striking workers at its plant in Portland, Oregon.

Monday began the third week of a strike by nearly 600 machinists and painters. Voting against their union's recommendation, members of the International Association of Machinists Local 1005 (IAM) and International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Local 1094 (IUPAT) struck against over a decade of concessions on July 1. Two other unions at the plant, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the Service Employees International Union, forced Daimler's contract offer onto the rank and file.

DTNA is the largest manufacturer of trucks in North America and is owned by Daimler-Benz AG, the global vehicle manufacturing giant. In the last decade workers at the Portland plant, located at the Swan Island Industrial Park, have been blackmailed into relinquishing wages, health and retirement benefits and suffer increased productivity.

The Portland plant builds the heavy-duty Western Star trucks used in logging, construction and oil fields. Many are built to individual customer specifications. The ability of scabs to start production is therefore limited. However, as Ken VanDuser told us, "It's intimidation. They are going to try to train these folks. They video-taped the job process to train these scabs."

The role of the IAM and IUPAT has been to suppress the outbreak of any genuine struggle in order to provide Daimler with a low-paid work force competitive with the superexploited Asian or Mexican worker. A 2007 strike, rejecting a concessions contract also endorsed by the union, was isolated and wound up by the IAM after two days. Despite givebacks on mandatory overtime and retiree benefits, the union trumpeted a bogus "job

security" agreement as a win.

According to picketer Doug Glad, "They gave us a contract that was worse than the first one we were offered."

Workers in Daimler's two plants in North Carolina have been forced to continue working by the United Auto Workers union despite the contract's expiration this past March. According to picket captain Lloyd Tolar, "I've had emails from Cleveland and Mt. Holly asking why they are still working while we are on strike. There was a 60-day extension that expired June 21 and then it was extended indefinitely. The struggle has to be all together."

One striker described the vans carrying scabs into the plant as having "eight to ten people per van with ex-military types, probably private security, driving." According to picketers, the vehicles barreled through the gate at a high rate of speed, nearly hitting one worker. One striker, John, reported, "Craig Blairs was walking toward the entrance, if he hadn't stopped he would have been run over."

There has, as of this writing, been no response by the union to the provocation by Daimler. The strikers the WSWS spoke with have had no news of any actions by the IAM to prevent scabs entering Daimler's plant. There has been no posting on this development on the Local's web site and IAM official Joe Kear told the WSWS, "I am not commenting to you. I think you do a pretty bad job."

Opposed to any mass mobilization of the working class to prevent scabs from entering the plant, the IAM has blocked any expansion of the struggle while policing workers on the picket lines on behalf of management.

Tim Cernac wanted to know, "Why is this not in the media? Why is our strike not in the news? They have

people in there working. The union should jump in and get the media down here. There are 700 jobs at stake.”

Don said, “Why can’t we go and picket at corporate headquarters? If this is the way the union will go this is the last contract I will vote on. The company said that on the last strike we folded like chairs.”

John added, “Is it a law or are we just being fed a line from the union?” Commenting on the scabs entering, “The first van had a camera on us. We called the police who said, ‘if you see him coming get out of the way.’”

Doug Glad told the WSWS, “According to Joe [Kear] we can only picket a building we work in.” He added, “Why did the UAW extend their contract when ours was up?”

Discussing the low wages, he said, “Channel Eight News reported that it takes a minimum of \$69,000 for a family of four to live in the Portland area. We make an average of \$42,000 without overtime. At one point you have to say enough is enough.”

Steven Carson asked, “Why does the union not hire professional negotiators? We can’t comprehend the dollars as fast as they can.”

Daimler workers are confronting not simply a global corporation but a political and economic system that seeks to reverse decades of rights that the working class has won through bitter struggles. The IAM, IUPAT, and the rest of the unions are incapable of organizing any response to the globally coordinated onslaught on wages, benefits and working conditions. Instead, to insure their own interests, they work to undermine any serious struggle by rank-and-file workers in order to provide cheap labor so that jobs will remain in the US.

The emergence of a unified opposition of workers would provide a rallying point for tens of thousands and millions of workers who are disgusted with the union’s spinelessness and are looking for a way to fight their deteriorating wages and working conditions. For this to occur requires the formation of a rank-and-file committee independent of the unions that will reach out to all Daimler workers internationally and the working class as a whole.

The policy of the Obama administration has been to work with the corporations and the unions to drive down workers’ living standards. A new road demands a political break with the pro-capitalist and nationalist outlook of the unions and the Democratic Party. A new leadership is required that fights for the international

unity of the working class and the socialist transformation of society.



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