

Unions impose concessions contract on Portland Daimler Truck workers

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After three weeks on strike, Daimler workers in Portland, Oregon narrowly voted to accept a substandard contract. The new contract does nothing to recoup the concessions that have been extorted by Daimler over the last 11 years.

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) played the most despicable role in blackmailing workers, using intimidation tactics to sway the vote toward a contract that was virtually unchanged from Daimler's "best last and final offer." Prior to the vote many workers expressed confidence that the contract would be voted down. The vote of 225 to 209 showed the immense opposition among the rank and file. Several workers voiced suspicion of the validity of the vote count.

IAM Local 1005 and International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Local 1094 (IUPAT) struck Daimler Truck July 1. Two other unions, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the Service Employees International Union, forced Daimler's contract offer onto the rank and file.

Tran Hein said, "They didn't do anything, the last contract was thirty-six months now they have four months more for an extra twenty-five cents. I didn't trust them on the vote."

Brad Rasmussen told WSWs reporters, "Joe Kear said that eight [scab-built] trucks are going out a day, sixteen vans drove in full of strikebreakers. I'm pretty sure it's going to be voted no, a lot of people are yelling in there. Everyone that's on stage is against us; they are saying any contract we get after this will be worse. It seems like Daimler management is on the stage."

Despite reaching a tentative agreement with Daimler on Friday, details of the contract were not released until a posting on the union's website late Sunday, not even

24 hours before the meeting. That gave Daimler workers minimal time to examine the fine print of the new contract.

Many workers cited IAM Business Manager Joe Kear's repeated statement that was the 'best offer' they're going to get. Monty Mercer said, "I don't think we got any representation. I feel that we didn't get any backing from the union; they didn't give us any way to fight. We had the right to vote, but in their opinion they felt that this was the best contract we were going to get."

The new contract adds a measly twenty-five cents to the \$1.30 wage increase offer originally rejected and an additional four months added to the term of the three-year contract. This amount is to be reduced by twenty-one cents for employee healthcare costs and will be spread out over the forty months of the contract. Many workers pointed out that the new expiration date of the contract would have a future strike take place during the cold and rainy fall season.

Socialist Equality Party members distributed a statement calling for the rejection of the contract and the election of a rank-and-file committee to appeal to all Daimler workers to expand the strike. It called for the mobilization of Daimler workers nationally and globally behind the fight of the Portland Daimler workers.

John Tesler said, "The vote was split. A lot of people didn't come and could have made a difference. The company could have given us more. I don't know if the company put the fear of God in people by threatening to move the plant, but if they wanted to move the plant they would have done so long before now. As far as the reason for the four month extension, Joe [Kear] didn't have a reason for that."

The ability of Daimler to impose yet another

concessions contract rested on the union's isolation of the strike. Thousands of Daimler workers—who also contend with inferior wages and onerous productivity demands—continued to produce trucks for the company throughout North and South America as well as in Europe throughout the strike. Not one of the unions at Daimler's Portland plant made any effort to reach out to these workers for support.

Chris Lemm said, "One of us going out on strike is not going to stop Daimler. We spent two-and-a-half hours talking about how this is the best contract. When they talk about the plant moving, it's a scare tactic. America is no longer running lean, it's running anorexic. I'm a welder getting top wage and I'm still living with my parents. I couldn't even get a loan for a used car. I have two degrees and I'm paying off the debt for those."

Tom Evans said, "We all want to go back to work, but that is not the point here. It's that we gave up two dollars an hour. There are Daimler plants are all over the world. I'm not sure how this struggle will go forward. We are told that this is the best we are going to get."

The betrayal of the strike by the IAM raises the need for a new program and leadership.

The struggle of Daimler is not only economic, but also political in nature. To move forward, a new way must be forged against the mass attacks on jobs and wages by the Obama administration and the entire capitalist system. The White House policy of "insourcing" jobs while, hailed by the unions, is simply the replacement of the low-wage workers employed in Asia, Mexico or South America with low-wage workers in the United States.

The fight to defend jobs as well as education, housing and health care requires the building of an independent political movement of the working class. The banks and big corporations such as Daimler must be nationalized, placed under the democratic ownership and control and run to meet human need not private profit.



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