

# Injunction issued against Kohler strikers in Wisconsin

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The day after more than 2,000 striking workers at Wisconsin's Kohler Company staged a march and mass picket, an injunction was issued by a Sheboygan County circuit court judge.

Kohler, the multinational plumbing fixture manufacturer, filed a complaint requesting that strikers be banned from "engaging in mass picketing or a show or demonstration of force or threats of force or intimidating or coercing Kohler Co.'s employees, prospective employees and/or business invitees in the exercise of rights guaranteed to them by law."

In the restraining order issued by Judge James Bolgert that language was struck.

Kohler Director of Security Patrick McCarthy filed an affidavit with the court alleging that pickets assaulted security officers, saying, "Some of our contract security officers were also assaulted by picketers (elbows in the ribs, etc.)"

Tim Tayloe, the president of United Auto Workers Local 833, issued a statement reported in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: "That is totally false. If anything happened it was from their hit men. ...They had one guy who stopped, and stepped on the gas and almost hit one of the picketers."

Rather than defending the actions of his membership, Tayloe felt the need to apologize publicly to the press, saying that pickets should not interfere with traffic: "I can understand the points of the police officers. It's for everybody's safety to try and keep the guys off the road."

He added that he "heard language was getting out of hand," and admonished pickets for what they said to people crossing the line. To the press, he said, "They don't need to use bad language with them."

Tayloe and the UAW continue to work to isolate and wear down the struggle of the 2,100 Kohler workers

who voted 94 percent in favor of rejecting the company's "last, best and final offer" Friday.

The UAW is determined to prevent a united struggle of the Kohler workers with autoworkers at Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler, where the UAW is attempting to conclude its efforts to ram through pro-company deals this week. Voting at Ford concludes today, with momentum shifting against the contract over the past two days.

Despite rainy weather, hundreds of strikers amassed along the street in front of the plant on Tuesday, the day the injunction was issued. Tayloe told the media, "When you've got a couple hundred people at each gate, it can get out of hand at times."

Members of a local Veterans Auxiliary organized an impromptu march on Highland Drive, in front of the Kohler plant, which was disbanded by police. Officers threatened to arrest strikers and veterans before they moved off the street.

Tensions are building as the Kohler workers are determined to fight. The main issues are the two-tier wage system, which has been in place since the UAW agreed to it after the 2008 economic crash, and the degradation of their health care plan.

The company has publicly announced that it will continue to run production during the strike and is seeking to intimidate workers by ordering them to come in to work.

Jacob Wine, a Kohler striker told WTMJ News, "I hope this goes quick, but you know, I'll be standing out here for as long as I have to." The UAW will pay strike pay of just \$200 a week, which is not enough to live on. Wine, who has two children, spoke on his expenses, "Well \$800 rent a month. That's gonna be paid no matter what. But then that's gonna take from other things you know, gas, electric, utilities, that comes to

roughly \$200 a month for all of that.”

There is deep public sympathy for the strikers. The *Journal Sentinel*, however, has devoted more ink to the problems caused for the hotel across the street than to the strike itself. The American Club, which was opened by Herbert V. Kohler, Jr. in 1981, is five-star hotel that was converted from a building constructed in 1918 to house Kohler’s immigrant workforce.

The Village of Kohler was founded in 1873 as a company town. The well-connected Kohler family, with two members serving as Wisconsin governors in the 1930s and 1950s, has a long history of violent opposition to the working class. During the first strike to unionize, Kohler mobilized a special police to attack pickets. Two workers were killed and 43 were injured.



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