

After six-month lockout, workers reject UAW-Honeywell ultimatum

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After being locked out for more than six months, workers at the Honeywell Aerospace factory in South Bend, Indiana voted down the latest contract “offer” from the multi-billion dollar firm earlier this month. The workers courageously defied the gang-up of Honeywell and the United Auto Workers union, which hoped the exhaustion of unemployment benefits and isolation of their struggle by the UAW would be enough to break the will of rank-and-file workers who are fighting sweeping health care, pension and wage concessions.

On May 9, Honeywell locked out the 317 workers at its aircraft wheel and brake factory in South Bend after they voted 9-to-1 to reject the company’s “best and final” offer. Another 41 workers who make steel brake pads at Honeywell’s Green Island, New York plant, near Albany, were also locked out.

The original UAW-backed deal included demands for sharp increases in out-of-pocket health care costs for active and retired workers, cuts in pensions and the further subcontracting out of work. The wage offer included an insulting 2 percent raise and the continuation of the hated two-tier wage system.

Honeywell International, which produces components for commercial and defense aircraft and automobiles, along with climate control systems, is highly profitable. Over 10 years, its stock price has quadrupled to \$115 per share. Its CEO, David Cote, who was paid \$34.5 million last year and cashed in another \$36 million in stock options, is in line for a \$168 million pension when he is replaced next year.

On November 12 workers rejected a “revised” offer, which company officials said had been drawn up with the UAW. “After working very closely with your union representatives, we were extremely disappointed Local 9 rejected the company’s latest comprehensive offer,”

a letter from company executives said. It added that this was the company’s “best offer and it will not get richer.”

The letter acknowledged that the UAW had agreed to “changes to overtime” and the deal had been based on “the union’s proposal” to eliminate overtime payments after working eight hours a day. Instead Honeywell workers will only be paid time-and-a-half after working more than 40 hours in a week. During Obama’s 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler, the UAW agreed to similar terms, which have sanctioned workdays of 10 hours or more at straight time undermining the health and family lives of workers.

“Our offer is fair, reasonable and consistent with what other U.S. unions within Honeywell have already approved, including another UAW local in Michigan and your colleagues in Green Island,” the letter notes, concluding, “At this point, there are no further negotiation sessions scheduled. We know these are difficult decisions, but your opportunity to return to work depends on a ratified agreement.”

While Local 9 officials brought the deal back “without recommendation,” it is clear that the UAW, and particularly the International union executives, were pushing for ratification.

“The contract we just voted on was overwhelmingly rejected,” said Mike, a veteran Honeywell worker, who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*. “The company did not change its offer and it’s clear they just want to starve us out. I’m not going back. I don’t want to work for an employer that treats its employees horribly.

“The UAW International came in and said there was not much they could do. They said we should consider voting in favor of the company’s offer. I’ll never work for a union shop again. I’m not anti-union—my father and grandfather were UAW members at Budd Wheel in

Gary, Indiana—but they are not representing us.

“The UAW has talked workers into screwing the future workers with these tiered wages, which are everywhere now. You’re working side-by-side with another worker making \$10 less an hour than you. The UAW says this is necessary to save our jobs, but it is never ending. The young workers are also being stripped of pensions.”

“The greed of this company is obvious. Honeywell knows you can’t find a non-skilled job that pays \$18 an hour any more. A general laborer around here only gets \$12 to \$13 an hour. At the same time, Honeywell’s CEO made \$14,000 every hour last year.”

The Honeywell lockout is part of the long-standing corporate offensive against the wages, health care and pension benefits, which was accelerated by the Obama administration in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash.

From his first days in office Obama cultivated the closest relations with Fortune 500 executives and his chief domestic initiative—the Affordable Care Act—is designed to dismantle the long-established system of employer-paid health care and shift the cost of medical coverage to workers.

Honeywell’s David Cote was the most frequent CEO visitor to Obama’s White House, having turned up more than 50 times, according to White House logs. In January 2009, Cote introduced Obama’s stimulus package in a White House speech and the Honeywell boss was subsequently appointed to serve on Obama’s bipartisan Deficit Commission, which proposed savage cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. He also sits on Obama’s corporate competitiveness board—the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership—along with other corporate executives and the president of the United Steelworkers union, Leo Gerard.

“Honeywell is using Obamacare to force us to pay a \$5,000 deductible before a couple can get any medical care covered by insurance,” Mike told the WSWS. “I would have to pay up to \$13,500 out-of-pocket expenses every year, and it would be far more for family coverage. You can get better coverage at Bed, Bath and Beyond. Honeywell even wants to reduce payments for short-term disability from 60 percent down to 30 percent.

“Honeywell is using Obama’s Cadillac Tax to make us pay more. They took the government’s proposal and

added \$2,500 to it. The UAW was partners with Obama and they supported this.”

While Honeywell workers remain determined, the UAW and other unions are systematically isolating their struggle. The United Steelworkers has ordered its 150 members to remain on the job at Honeywell’s nuclear fuel production and uranium processing plant in Metropolis, Illinois. Honeywell locked out workers at that facility for eight months in 2014-2015, following a 13-month lockout in 2010-11. During the lockout Obama took Cote along with him on a trip to India to open up new markets for US-based transnational corporations.

“The Democrats should be protecting union workers,” said Mike, who added that he voted for Obama in 2008 but “lost faith” in him by 2012, and voted for Trump two weeks ago “because the status quo is not working out.”

“I hated both of the candidates but I saw Trump as the lesser of two evils. Clinton is for Obamacare. I’m sick of this global BS. Honeywell has opened a wheel factory in China and is now looking at India,” he said.

The fact that workers like Mike were susceptible to the “American First” propaganda of Trump is entirely due to the anti-working class policies of the Democrats and the betrayals of unions like the UAW, which have long promoted anti-Asian and anti-Mexican nationalism to cover up their collusion with the corporate bosses.

Eighty years ago, rank-and-file workers, led by socialists and left-wing militants, organized a sit-down strike at the Bendix—now Honeywell—plant in South Bend that paved the way for the establishment of the UAW as a mass industrial union. A renewal of mass struggles is inevitable but today that will take the form of a rebellion against the pro-company UAW and its nationalist program, which blocks American workers from unifying with their class brothers and sisters around the world against global firms like Honeywell International.



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