

Nine-month lockout of Honeywell workers ends as UAW pushes through company's demands

Jessica Goldstein
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Workers at the Honeywell International Aerospace plant in South Bend, Indiana voted on Saturday, February 25 to ratify a five-year contract, ending a bitter struggle against the corporation. Over 300 workers at the South Bend plant, which manufactures brakes and wheels for both military and commercial aircraft, had been locked out for more than nine months.

The workers at the plant voted against the initial concessions contracts put forth by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union and the company. On May 3, 2016, the company locked the workers out of the plant, and hired scabs from the notorious strikebreaking firm Strom Engineering to continue production. After the workers had been locked out for six months, they courageously rejected another contract pushed by the UAW on November 12, 2016.

Having finally worn down the workers—who had been cut off of medical benefits, unemployment pay, and were living on the UAW's starvation rations of \$200 a week in strike pay—the UAW was able to push the deal through last weekend, just two weeks after sponsoring a bogus solidarity rally, which served as a kiss of death to the struggle.

Under the new five-year contract, the Honeywell workers will receive a paltry 2 percent wage increase in 2017, 2019 and 2020, and nothing in 2021. Increases in health care costs will more than chew up the meager raise. A full plan for a family now costs \$615.69 a month, including a \$3,000 deductible, which is close to the same monthly rate as a bronze plan for a family under Obamacare.

The contract also eliminates pensions for all new hires starting after May 3, 2016, and initiates a

401(K)-style retirement plan for all other employees with a meager 2 percent contribution from the company. Personal days and sick days are also eliminated, forcing workers to use vacation time to make up the costs of such absences.

The company stands to reap millions of dollars in revenue from the contract. Honeywell International, the product of mergers and acquisitions carried out under decades of bipartisan policies that have lifted corporate regulations, is currently worth \$39 billion dollars and has seen its stocks soar over the past five years. Stock prices for the company closed at \$124.50 per share on February 28, in comparison to \$59.75 per share on March 2, 2012.

Honeywell International, a major defense contractor, has reaped massive profits and has richly rewarded its top executives and shareholders. CEO David Cote, who was paid a total of \$34.5 million in 2015 and cashed in another \$36 million in stock options, is set to retire next year with a \$168 million pension.

Cote visited the Obama White House more than any other CEO during his presidency. He was appointed to serve on Obama's bipartisan Deficit Commission, which proposed savage cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. In September of 2016, in the final months of the Obama presidency, Honeywell was awarded an \$18.3 million contract with the US Navy, in preparation for the escalation of the US wars in the Middle East and military provocations in the South China Sea and along the Western border of Russia.

Mike, a veteran worker at the South Bend Honeywell plant, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "It's not surprising that the deal finally got through. The UAW basically wore us down. The UAW International was

encouraging a ‘yes’ vote from day one. They wanted to get a contract and collect dues, not pay out strike benefits. Right after the lockout began, the local UAW president was given a position in the UAW International. I’ll never work for another union company.”

The resilience and militancy of the workers was demonstrated by their repeated refusal to accept the concessions contract. But the UAW deliberately isolated the locked-out workers at the South Bend plant and a smaller facility in Green Island, New York. This occurred even as Honeywell prepared a major attack on 1,000 workers in its home state of Minnesota. Last week, the Teamsters agreed to a contract that ends health care benefits for future and past Honeywell retirees.

Speaking on the isolation of the strike, Mike continued, “For Honeywell, it was easy to replace 300 workers here. It’s not like when the unions would strike all the company’s plants if one location was facing a battle. That doesn’t exist today. The UAW made us fight this big corporation alone.”

The UAW’s support for President Trump’s economic nationalism and “America First” policies underscores the true character of their organization and the entire American labor bureaucracy. Like Trump, the UAW supports the attacks on the living standards of workers and the lifting of corporate regulations to enrich the banks and line the pockets of CEOs like David Cote. The union leaders themselves are compensated handsomely for their loyalty to the capitalist class and pushing through one concession contract after another.

In opposition to Trump’s brutal policies toward immigrant workers, Mike told reporters, “I don’t buy the business from Trump that deporting Mexican immigrants is really to protect the American worker. The corporations and the government are working together.

“My thoughts are this whole CEO thing should be made illegal. They have no long-term interests in the health of the company. Whether a company is here or not in a year doesn’t matter if their pay keeps going up. The laws need to be changed—but it’s not going to happen because all the people with the money are making the decisions. They control the government, whether it’s the Democrats or Republicans in power.”

Workers must draw lessons from this bitter experience. The betrayal by the UAW exposes the utter worthlessness of the UAW and other unions, which function as direct tools of the corporations and the state. Workers must create new organizations of struggle: rank-and-file factory committees that are democratically controlled by workers themselves, based on the methods of the class struggle, and committed to the social rights of workers, not the profit demands of big business.

Second, workers must break with the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republicans represents the interests of the capitalist exploiters. What is needed is a mass political party of the working class committed to the socialist reorganization of the economy, including the nationalization of major corporations like Honeywell under the control of the working class, and the seizure of the ill-gotten gains of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

Workers must reject the “America First” nationalism peddled by Trump and the UAW and fight for the international unity of the working class for a common struggle against global corporations like Honeywell. We urge workers to contact the Socialist Equality Party to take up this fight.



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