

IAM pushes sellout deal on striking Chicago car mechanics

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After six weeks of a bitter strike, Chicago-area auto mechanics will vote today on a concessions contract being pushed by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) union Local 701. The Chicago New Car Dealer Committee (NCDC) says this is its “last, best, and final offer.”

Mechanics have been on strike for six weeks demanding better pay and working conditions, as well as improved training programs. Mechanics are not paid for the hours worked on the clock, but by the number of hours the automobile manufacturers assign to the parts they work on. Compensation for mechanics dwindles every year, delivering greater profits to the Detroit- and international-based auto companies and the private dealerships.

At the beginning of the strike, Local 701 officials claimed there were fighting for a guaranteed 40 hours of part-labor per week. Mechanics are currently guaranteed only 34 hours of part-labor per week, even though they are required to work at least 40 hours on the clock. The majority must toil even longer to make ends meet. The NCDC’s final offer includes an insulting raise to 35 hours of part-labor guaranteed per week. The IAM has reduced its proposal to 36 hours, to be implemented by the third year of the contract.

Far from defending the striking mechanics, the IAM and other city unions have deliberately isolated the embattled workers and limited them to starvation-level strike benefits. At the same time, the IAM has encouraged workers to look to the federal mediator and Democratic politicians like US Senator Dick Durbin and State Senator Tom Cullerton, who answer to big business, not the working class.

In the final weeks of the struggle, the union began to break the unity of workers by signing deals with individual dealerships and shutting down picket lines

one-by-one. The union has also kept workers in the dark about both the terms it has been negotiating with the NCDC and the dealerships that have reportedly broken to make side agreements.

Jim, a journeyman at a Hyundai dealership picket in Glenview, a suburb of Chicago, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We don’t know what kind of deal they have struck with the dealers that have broken away. We’ve heard they got 35 [guaranteed part-labor hours] for 3 years, 36 on the fourth year. A dollar more per hour for base pay. If you book more than 35 hours, you will get a \$1.50 more for base pay.”

The fact that the IAM is trying to ram through an agreement that workers have had no time to seriously examine and discuss only highlights its disloyal and pro-company character. At the same time, the IAM is working in tandem with management to exploit the economic hardships of workers to break the resistance of the rank and file to a deal dictated by management.

The NCDC has warned workers if they do not go back to work this week, they will lose their healthcare coverage and be forced to pay for expensive COBRA plans, which can cost up to \$1,200 per month for a family. The union has responded by suggesting workers sign up for Affordable Care Act options, which would saddle workers with expensive and substandard health care.

Mechanics have not stood on the picket lines for six weeks and sacrificed so much in order to accept a contract that will force them to work long hours under poor conditions for meager pay. Mechanics should reject this blackmail with the contempt that it deserves and fight to mobilize the broadest support throughout the working class to fight for the social right to secure and good-paying jobs.

The union, management and local, state and federal

politicians want to end the strike as soon as possible precisely because there is growing anger throughout the city over the growth of social inequality, falling wages and rising living costs.

Workers should vote “no” on the sellout contract. But this is only the beginning. Workers must take the conduct of the struggle and the negotiations out of the hands of the IAM by forming rank-and-file committees to formulate workers’ demands and fight for them. These committees, which must function independently of the unions and the corporate-controlled politicians, should reach out to teachers, transit workers, healthcare workers, high-school and college students to begin an industrial and political counteroffensive of the working class against the capitalist profit system and to secure the social rights of all workers.



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