

Chicago area auto mechanics reject dealers' "last, best and final offer"

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On Monday, striking auto mechanics in the Chicago area decisively rejected the "last, best and final offer" from the New Car Dealer Committee (NCDC), a business coalition of 130 dealerships, that was brought back for a vote by the Automobile Mechanics Local 701, an affiliate of the International Association of Machinists (IAM).

Over 2,000 mechanics have been on strike since August 1 fighting for decent wages, benefits and work schedules. Despite facing the cutoff of health insurance and other economic hardships, exacerbated by the miserly strike benefits paid out by the IAM, the mechanics courageously voted 701-543 to defeat the concession demands of the car dealers. The strikers also defied the campaign of intimidation by local politicians and police who have been escorting scabs through their picket lines.

This is the third time workers voted down the NCDC's demands, which include increased employee health care payments and continuing the abusive practice of unpaid work time. A technician could work up to 45 hours a week but only be paid 34 hours due to time and pay limits for particular repairs set by the original equipment manufacturers.

While Local 701 claimed its bargaining committee did not back the deal, the IAM nevertheless brought it up for a vote, hoping financial pressures on the strikers and their families would be sufficient enough to break the will of the rank and file. Far from strengthening these embattled workers, the IAM and other area unions have left the mechanics fight to this battle alone, while encouraging a sickly dependence on a federal mediator and Democratic politicians like US Senator Dick Durbin and Illinois State Senator Tom Cullerton.

In recent weeks, the IAM has sought to break the unity of striking workers by signing separate contracts

with individual dealers and shutting down picket lines one by one. In any case, Local 701's supposed counter-proposal differs in no substantial way from management's final offer.

The mechanics' vote is an expression of growing resistance and radicalization among the broadest sections of the working class, who find it impossible to live with falling wages and ever higher health care and living costs. Although Chicago's Democratic Party political establishment and the media regularly portray the city's western suburbs as politically conservative, the worsening social crisis in DuPage County is shifting workers and young people to the left. Nearly 14 percent of the county's children are "food insecure" after the growth of joblessness and low-paying jobs following the 2008 financial crash.

Announcing the rejection of the vote on the union's web site, Local 701 officials write that the "membership will remain on strike." The local union and IAM, however, offer no strategy for workers to win. On the contrary, the union intends to resume its behind-the-scenes maneuvers with management and the federal mediator. This makes it clear the union, no less than the bosses, are looking to wear down workers and soften them up for another sellout deal, which will at most contain only cosmetic changes.

Rank-and-file mechanics cannot leave their fate in the hands of this disloyal crowd.

The IAM has repeatedly isolated and defeated workers' struggles from the 2012 strike by Caterpillar workers in Joliet, Illinois to the repeated betrayals of Boeing workers in Washington. The same is true for every other union, including the Chicago Teachers Union and the Amalgamated Transit Union, which long ago abandoned any defense of workers and were transformed into direct tools of the corporations and the

government.

There is an enormous gap between the interests of auto mechanics and the business executives who run the unions and prosper from their collusion with the bosses. While workers have sacrificed everything to wage this nearly seven-week-old strike,

IAM International President Robert Martinez pocketed \$342,377 in 2015 and the union's 11 general vice presidents took home an average \$280,000 in salaries, according to the US Labor Department.

On the local level, Local 701 directing business representative Samuel Cicinelli took in \$170,183 in 2015, and assistant directing business representative Armando Arreola got \$140,879. This does not include whatever fees and business opportunities the Local 701 executives get from serving as trustees on the Union and Industry Welfare and Pension Funds and apprenticeship programs.

In rejecting the blackmail of management and the union, mechanics are saying enough is enough. But mechanics cannot wage this fight alone. The Socialist Equality Party encourages mechanics to set up rank-and-file strike committees to draw up their own demands, including a 40-hour workweek and good pay and benefits.

These committees should reach out to workers throughout the metropolitan area—teachers, firefighters, transit workers, Amazon and other warehouse and transport workers—to wage a coordinated counter-offensive against the relentless attack on workers' jobs and living standards.

A struggle to mobilize the full strength of the working class must be combined with a new political strategy to oppose the entire corporate-controlled political establishment—from the right-wing billionaire in the White House and his government of oligarchs, generals and fascists to the Democratic Party and the pawns of Wall Street like Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

Attaining the resources necessary to guarantee the social rights of the working class, including the right to a good paying and secure job, will require a direct assault on the ill-gotten wealth of the corporate and financial aristocracy, and a radical redistribution of society's riches to meet the needs of working people whose labor produces the wealth.

The SEP urges striking mechanics to contact our

party to discuss this strategy and build the leadership to take forward their critical struggle.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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