

Union shuts down strike at Borgers auto parts plant in Norwalk, Ohio

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Workers at the Borgers automotive parts facility in Norwalk, Ohio returned to work Sunday morning following a 10-day strike that began on January 21. Despite the determined efforts by workers, who maintained pickets in temperatures which rarely rose above freezing, the strike was shut down by the union before it achieved any of the workers' demands.

The demands of the strike included better wages and benefits—workers at the plant make as little as \$13 per hour—and recognition of the union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)-affiliated Workers United-Chicago Midwest Regional Joint Board (CMRJB) to represent them.

Borgers is a multinational auto parts company based in Germany, which operates 24 plants throughout North America, Europe and China. The Norwalk facility, according to the company's website, produces luggage compartment trims and outer wheel arch liners for General Motors.

The union shut down the strike even though workers were in a powerful position, as major automakers are struggling with significant supply issues which have forced temporary shutdowns of assembly plants around the country. Moreover, the state of Ohio is a critical component of the North American supply chain in the auto industry, and is one of the few that offers complete end-to-end production, demonstrating the potential for a broader struggle uniting Borgers workers with workers across the industry.

The CMRJB, for its part, has presented the strike as a purely symbolic "victory." Doug Warren, the Secretary-Treasurer of the CMRJB, wrote in a statement, "The Borgers strikers captured the attention and imagination of workers from around [Ohio], and across America."

However, while the strike drew considerable support from workers throughout the region, Workers United

made no effort to mobilize this support or its 80,000 members to support the strike, much less autoworkers at others plants, including parts workers at the Ventra plant in nearby Sandusky. The United Auto Workers recently overrode an overwhelming vote to authorize strike action at the Ventra plant, where dozens of workers have contracted coronavirus, to force through a sellout contract.

As a next course of action, the union plans on filing a petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for a union certification vote. This is in line with the far more common tactic which the unions have employed since the 1980s to gain recognition in nonunion shops: to seek official sanction from the capitalist state while working out backroom deals with management for massive concessions in exchange for union recognition.

Similar tactics were used in the United Auto Workers' failed bid to unionize a Volkswagen assembly plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee. VW actually responded favorably to the UAW's bid, because it wanted to set up a works council at the plant, a corporatist body common in Germany in which management and the union jointly enforce concessions. Faced with this prospect, as well as the miserable record of betrayals by the UAW, Chattanooga workers twice voted down the union, in 2014 and 2019.

This was also the strategy of the International Association of Machinists at a major aircraft production plant in North Charleston, South Carolina. Workers at the plant, who initially voted to bring in the IAM in 2007, voted to decertify the union in 2009 after the union officials cut a sweetheart deal with new owner Boeing, which contained sweeping concessions in exchange for continuing union recognition. A subsequent unionization vote in 2017 was defeated by a

wide margin.

Workers United, founded in 2009 out of a factional split in the bureaucracy of UNITE HERE, has its own history of betrayals. Last year, the union accepted the layoffs of 2,858 of its members at California's Disneyland Resort. The contract between the resort and Workers United Local 50 guaranteed the ability of the company to carry out layoffs, with the only stipulation being that these be done on the basis of seniority.

Making appearances on the Borgers picket line were Norwalk mayor and former police chief Dave Light, and Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan. Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown also issued a letter in support of the strikers. All are members of the Democratic Party. Workers should be alarmed by the intervention of these figures.

The real attitude of the Democrats to working class opposition has been demonstrated in the use of riot police against Hunts Point strikers in New York City, and threats by Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot to lock out teachers who refuse to return to in-person instruction in the midst of the global pandemic.

The workers at Borgers, and all workers, must draw the necessary conclusions. They must take the fight for their interests into their own hands through new organizations of struggle. The Socialist Equality Party is appealing to all workers to join their brothers and sisters in auto plants, Amazon warehouses and school districts around the country to form rank-and-file safety committees, independent of and in opposition to the trade unions and their backers in the Democratic Party.



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