

UAW blocks strike, moves for snap contract vote for 1,300 Detroit Diesel workers

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Work at Detroit Diesel? We want to hear from you: Tell us about the conditions at your plant and what workers want to see in the next contract. Your identity will be kept confidential.

The United Auto Workers has called informational meetings for Friday following the announcement earlier this week of a contract settlement with Detroit Diesel. The deal covers some 1,300 workers at its facility in Redford, Michigan, west of Detroit. Voting on the contract, details of which still have not been released at the time of this writing, has been set for May 10.

The one-year contract extension expired on April 29, but an 11th hour settlement averted a strike. On April 20 workers voted 98 percent to authorize a strike.

Detroit Diesel Corporation (DDC) is a subsidiary of Daimler Trucks North America. The workers build heavy duty engines and chassis components for commercial trucks, including some engines used for military purposes.

Contract highlights were scheduled to be released Friday, giving workers no time to review the deal before the scheduled informational sessions Friday. No announcement has been made on whether the full contract will be released to workers before the vote next week.

In one Facebook group where brief updates have been posted throughout the week, comments were disabled by the UAW, evidently to prevent any discussion or questions being raised by workers. Similar measures were employed during the UAW's bid to ram through a sellout contract to end a strike last year at John Deere.

The one-year extension was agreed to by the United Auto Workers in 2021 when the five-year contract initially signed in 2016 expired. The 2016 agreement included a \$5,000 signing bonus and a tiny \$1 an hour across-the-board wage increase. Under the previous agreement, employees started at just \$15 an hour and needed to work nine years before being eligible for \$24 an hour. Legacy workers with 10 years or more topped out at

\$30.49 an hour. The one-year extension included a \$1 raise and \$1,000 signing bonus.

Contract updates on Facebook and YouTube by UAW Local 163 shop chair Mark "Gibby" Gibson provided no specifics of the reported agreement or details of the contract talks. In response to questions, Gibson offered only evasions and double talk, while heaping praise on the UAW bargaining committee.

It is not clear whether the final contract language has even been agreed to, with Gibson indicating that UAW International President Ray Curry was planning to "work things out" ahead of informational meetings. "I think Ray can get us over the hump," Gibson added cryptically.

The fact that Ray Curry is involved in the talks at DDC should be taken as a sharp warning. In 2021 Curry sabotaged a powerful strike by Volvo workers, forcing repeated votes on regressive contracts that failed to meet workers basic demands. In 2019, Curry also oversaw the sellout of the strike by 3,500 Mack-Volvo Trucks workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and other states. He forced an end to the strike without letting workers even see the details of the contract he had helped negotiate.

Detroit Diesel workers must demand the full contract language and adequate time to review the agreement ahead of any vote, at least two weeks. There is no legitimate reason for the UAW to withhold the details of negotiations with DDC prior to presenting the agreement. The fact that the UAW has not revealed its demands can only benefit management and creates the possibility for the UAW to hail as a "victory" whatever miserable deal they have cobbled together.

Workers should vote down a contract that fails to meet their basic needs, which are wage increases that keep pace with inflation and make up for years of substandard wages; an end to the hated tier system, and the restoration of rights surrendered by the UAW in past contracts, including cost of living and pensions.

Workers are in a strong position to press for significant improvements. DDC global parent Daimler Trucks AG saw profits rise to \$2.68 billion in 2021 based on a 37 percent rise in sales.

The contract fight at DDC takes place in the midst of an escalation of the class struggle in the US and globally, as corporations seek to make workers pay through inflation for the cost of the disastrous pandemic policies of the ruling class and expanding wars.

Over 1,000 agricultural implement and heavy equipment workers are currently on strike at CNH Industrial in Wisconsin and Iowa for the first time in 18 years. Instead of joining forces with the CNH workers, the Detroit Diesel contract negotiations are being isolated and siloed off from other sections of workers. This is part of the UAW's divide-and-conquer strategy, which it has been employing in the recent uptick of working class struggles as workers are determined to fight for better wages and working conditions amid increasing inflation and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to wreak havoc in the auto plants.

To wage a fight for a contract that meets their basic demands, workers need to follow the example of other autoworkers, health care workers, teachers and Amazon workers by establishing a rank-and-file committee, independent of the UAW, at Detroit Diesel. This committee must campaign for the rejection of any contract that does not meet the needs of workers. Workers should prepare for strike action to win a decent contract, standing shoulder to shoulder with striking workers at CNH as well as autoworkers throughout the US and globally.

To speak with someone at the WSWS about organizing a rank-and-file committee at Detroit Diesel, fill out the form below:



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