

One week after decisive contract rejection, why aren't workers at Detroit Diesel on strike?

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter

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UAW Local 163 is censoring Detroit Diesel workers by shutting off commenting on its Facebook page. The World Socialist Web Site wants to provide Detroit Diesel workers with a voice. Tell us what you think about the contract and what you think must be done to win your demands. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

One week after 1,300 workers at Detroit Diesel voted down a deeply regressive contract proposal by nearly 80 percent, why are they still on the job?

Workers voted down the tentative agreement by 79 percent last Tuesday, after previously voting to authorize a strike by 98 percent. The contract fell far below not only their expectations but even a basic subsistence level needed for workers to survive. The deal contained a pathetic 8 percent cumulative wage increase over the life of the six-year agreement, below even inflation for one year. It maintained the two-tier wage structure, cut benefits and reduced an absurd nine-year wage progression to six years, still too long a period. Management and the UAW sought to grease the way for its passage through a \$6,000 signing bonus, proving the rule of thumb that the worst the contract, the bigger the bonus.

The UAW is ignoring the democratic decision of the workers themselves by keeping them on the job. Meanwhile, the union is retreating to behind closed doors with company negotiators. But if management's "best offer" was to cut wages by 30 percent through inflation, what is there left to talk about?

These endless delays, which help only management not workers, must be brought to an end. **Detroit Diesel workers should demand that UAW Local 163 immediately set a strike deadline for no later than**

May 24. If a contract is not reached by that time which meets all of workers' main demands, then they should walk out. The old union principle, "no contract, no work," which the UAW is flagrantly violating as it has in countless other contracts, must be upheld.

Workers are in a powerful position to demand and win a contract that protects them from inflation and begins to unwind more than two decades of concessions. Detroit Diesel builds engines that are used nationally and internationally. The contract struggle at Detroit Diesel is part of a broader movement by workers in the US and around the world. More than 1,000 agricultural equipment workers at CNH, who are also in the UAW, are on strike right now. A strike, moreover, would meet with powerful support from autoworkers in the Big Three and in the parts factories who have been pushed to the limit over the last two years and would welcome a strike at Detroit Diesel as an opportunity to press for their own demands.

Instead, the UAW is keeping Detroit Diesel workers in the dark about their talks with management and also the Big Three autoworkers in the dark about Detroit Diesel. It has displayed not the slightest interest in even consulting rank-and-file workers about what they want.

This is not the product of incompetent or weak local leadership by the bargaining committee or Local 163 President Mark "Gibby" Gibson. This is a deliberate strategy aimed at ramming through a sellout against the opposition of workers. Indeed, Gibson stated brazenly before the vote that, even in the case of a rejection, the main economics of the agreement would not change and that the UAW would not call a strike.

Local 163 is now dealing with opposition from the rank and file by censoring them, shutting off

commenting in its Facebook group. This decision comes after a combative contract meeting two weeks ago in which workers left hundreds of Facebook comments hostile to the deal on a livestream of the meeting, enabling them to discuss the deal with their coworkers and campaign for a rejection. By cutting off a key means through which workers can discuss their struggle amongst themselves, the union is seeking to isolate workers from each other and instill a mood of resignation, providing them with more favorable conditions in which to ram through an unpopular contract.

The union is following a playbook established by the UAW over the course of the past year, including in shutting down strikes at John Deere and Volvo Trucks and blocking strike action at Dana Inc. The union responded to the rejection of contracts by forcing workers to vote again on the same deals. This was preceded by a campaign of censorship and intimidation aimed at discouraging and isolating workers. In particular, the UAW also shut off commenting on its local Facebook pages prior to the vote at John Deere on a sellout contract which ended the strike.

The UAW betrays strikes because it is defending its own institutional interests. It is joined at the hip with the auto companies. **Indeed, UAW President Ray Curry sits on the Board of Supervisors of Daimler AG, the parent company of Detroit Diesel.** Appointed to the position in 2018, Curry draws an annual salary from the post of \$150,000, according to wallmine.com.

But regardless what the bureaucracy thinks, they are not all-powerful. A rank-and-file movement, organized and directed by workers themselves independent of the pro-corporate union structures, is capable of challenging and defeating the sellout which is underway.

Workers must move now to build such an organization, a rank-and-file committee, modeled on those which were built at Volvo Trucks, John Deere and Dana last year. This committee will provide workers with a forum for democratic discussion, outside of the bureaucracy's control, and enable them to fight for their own demands. The *World Socialist Web Site* recommends that these demands include:

- Cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) fully indexed to inflation;

- A 40 percent wage increase to catch up with inflation and make up for decades of concessions and wage stagnation;
- Fully paid medical, with no deductibles and copays;
- A three-year maximum contract expiration;
- Workers' control over health and safety, including the right to refuse to work in case of a coronavirus outbreak; and
- Restoration of full pensions and retiree health care for all classes of workers.

Workers who are interested in organizing a rank-and-file committee can contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* for assistance.

The *World Socialist Web Site* also stands ready to assist workers in circumventing the Local 163's social media gag order. The UAW wants to silence workers. We want to give them a voice. Contact us today to let us know: What do you think about the deal? What do you think needs to be done? All submissions will be kept completely anonymous.



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