Harley Davidson workers vote unanimously against tentative agreement in York, Pennsylvania

Nick Barrickman
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Are you a Harley Davidson worker? Fill out the form at the bottom of this article and let us know what you think of the agreement.

On Monday, nearly 1,000 workers at the Harley Davidson motorcycle assembly plant located in York County, Pennsylvania voted unanimously to reject a tentative agreement (TA) offered to them by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 175.

The facility was forced to close for two weeks during negotiations "out of an abundance of caution" after an unnamed defective part had been detected at the York facility. This occurred while the plant was "already struggling with supply issues," according to ABC News.

Workers impacted by the shutdown received their copy of the TA on Friday and were given the weekend to review its contents without the benefit of being able to interact with each other. On Monday, they were given an hour-long briefing by the IAM before being told to vote, resulting in a unanimous rejection of the TA.

"Did the company really think that the Tier 2s would accept continued wage inequality, no pension, and no increase in company 401k contributions?" states one worker on the Local 175 Facebook. "End the unfair and demeaning 2 Tier system," demands another. "We're either a united union body, or we're divided. 'United we stand' What happened to that?"

The company and IAM Local 175 have been silent about the contents of the TA. No further negotiation dates have been announced.

Harley Davidson has been operating in York since 1973. The company reported revenue earnings of $1.01 billion in 2021. This was a 40 percent increase above its pandemic-depressed sales in 2020.

According to a statement by Harley Davidson CEO and president Jochen Zeitz (net worth $23.1 million), "Harley-Davidson delivered a strong finish to the year, in which we have seen proof points on all elements of our Hardwire Strategy … we are fully committed to achieving our long-term Hardwire Strategy, as the most desirable motorcycle brand and company in the world."

The facility, over 561,000 square feet, recently expanded after the motorcycle company moved its Kansas City operations to the York area in 2019. Currently, the location manufactures "all Harley models, including the Softail, Sportster and Street motorcycles" previously made in Kansas City, according to the York *Daily Record*.

This followed a denunciation of the corporation by former Republican President Donald Trump, who endorsed a Harley Davidson boycott after the corporation announced tentative plans to relocate its production to Europe in response to the U.S.'s tariff ban on certain essential metals from China used for the motorcycles.

The latest rejection of the company's offers only demonstrates the cynicism underlying the "Buy American" demagogy of the American capitalist class.

The facility is run largely as an industrial sweatshop for its employees. A review on Indeed.com reveals that the facility was a "very toxic workplace" where "management passes troubles to production workers."

As with other workplaces throughout the United States and globally, the pandemic has impacted Harley workers. Workers infected with COVID-19 have reported the "many unnecessary hoops" (Indeed.com)

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they have had to jump through in order to receive sick leave at the company.

Workers also criticized Local 175 officials for ignoring their demands. “PLEASE actually walk the floor and talk to members on both shifts about what they actually need in the contract for it to be acceptable,” states one. “What we were shown today should have never been deemed appropriate to even show the membership, it did not and will not pass the smell check.”

According to a post on the Local’s website from April, “Local 175 Ready for Negotiations at Harley-Davidson after W3 Center’s Field Negotiation Prep Program,” the IAM negotiators participated in training which “provided the bargaining committee with the tools needed to develop a strategic negotiating plan.” One can assume that this “four-day training” course which produced a contract which workers unanimously rejected was paid for at workers’ expenses through their dues money.

The vote is only latest mass contract rejection, as workers throughout the US have begun to fight against the high cost of living and the impacts of inflation. The pro-corporate unions have collaborated with companies and the government to keep production running despite a pandemic while suppressing the push for higher wages to combat inflation.

In contrast to claims that the union bureaucrats are defending workers’ pay, a recent statistic published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that wage increases for unionized members averaged about 3.5 percent last year. In contrast, non-unionized workers saw averages of about 5 percent. This demonstrates the unions’ pro-corporate role.

The IAM machinists’ union can be relied on by Harley Davidson executives to continue this trend. Workers at the factory have already alluded to concerns that they may not receive a second TA offer and that the corporation may “pull a Kellogg’s on us” and simply impose its will without a vote.

In that struggle, a strike of nearly 1,400 workers was betrayed by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers’ union. According to internal company memos, the “final offer” imposed by Kellogg’s had “no gain overall … no ratification bonus,” but “most of the union’s negotiating committee is for this and plans to recommend it.”

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