

Bridgestone, Michelin tire workers speak out against USW sellout agreements

Marcus Day
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Work in the tire and rubber industry? Fill out the form below to let us know what you think of the tentative agreements and the conditions at your workplace.

Approximately 12,500 tire workers at Bridgestone, Goodyear and Michelin in the US are voting this week on sellout contracts brought back by the United Steelworkers union at the end of last month. The USW announced “last-minute” tentative agreements at each of the companies on July 29, 30 and 31.

Workers in the tire industry, like their brothers and sisters throughout the auto and auto parts industries, are determined to fight for major improvements to wages, health care and working hours and other conditions.

The USW, however, has worked to block a struggle in order to prevent any disruption to the flow of profits to both the tire companies and the major auto and heavy equipment makers.

At the Goodyear plant in Fayetteville, North Carolina, the USW announced a 24-hour contract extension just as workers began to picket on July 29, preventing a full-scale walkout.

Despite the efforts of the USW to keep workers isolated from each other and in the dark on what was being negotiated, workers responded with outrage as they began to learn about the terms of the deals. A number of tire workers contacted the WSWS to voice their opposition in recent days.

One Bridgestone worker in Des Moines, Iowa wrote to the WSWS, “The USWA have sold out to the big corporations they negotiated with!!! They are as bad as the government!! They should be held accountable for violating our bylaws!! They are breaking their own laws and policies to comply with the joke of contracts they have brought back to their members.

“I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if there isn’t a few

lawsuits over their actions and the local presidents that are complying with their request and screwing over their members on purpose and with complete knowledge that what they are doing is wrong!!!”

Another Bridgestone worker in Tennessee said: “It is absolutely sickening that USW are going against what the MEMBERS want! For too long these chimpanzees have taken and taken from their workers, finally we are ready to take a stand against corporate greed and the union, who is suppose to FIGHT for US, decides to instead give in to the companies and shackle its members!”

The worker continued: “It is more apparent now than it has ever been that USW is bought out by the companies and will not stand with their members and fight for the members’ wants! It is high time to stand as members and show not only the companies but USW itself that we are no longer going to get walked upon while we are the backbone that keeps things going!”

A second Bridgestone worker in Tennessee said the USW has not been negotiating “what the workers feel they deserve.” He added, “All we are is a number to them that supports their country club money and high living lifestyles. We should be able to strike if we feel without the International’s permission.”

Other tire workers beyond Bridgestone have also been speaking out against the contract on social media. A Michelin worker in Indiana, in response to a question on Facebook about the deal from a Michelin worker in Alabama, commented, “It’s crap. Everyone is saying they are voting no and I’m hoping you guys do too. We can get way better. It’s a low-ball contract offer.”

The USW’s tentative agreement with BFGoodrich/Michelin shows it has “negotiated” a deal that fully complies with the company’s demands for greater productivity and sweating more and more

profits out of workers.

The USW's contract summary begins by chastising BFGoodrich workers for excessive "absenteeism," stating: "During the 2022 negotiations, the committees were confronted with issues that affect our BFG facilities. The main focus was absenteeism. Absenteeism inhibits our ability to meet the ticket, and increases our cost per kg when compared with other Michelin Facilities. Continued absenteeism at these facilities is unsustainable.

"We must address the excessive absenteeism, that is within our control, to repair our credibility and secure the futures of our facilities."

Such statements demonstrate that the USW is nothing but a mouthpiece and enforcer for management.

"Absenteeism," which is also denounced by the United Auto Workers union, is the result of the unions's colluding with the companies to allow COVID-19 to spread without restraint throughout factories, resulting in untold numbers of severe cases and deaths, along with debilitating Long COVID. The USW, UAW and other unions have been working in the closest cooperation with the Biden administration to enforce its deadly "back to work" and "back to school" policies over the last two years, while working to block strikes and push through concessions contracts with below-inflation raises.

The companies have more than enough money to dramatically raise workers' pay and improve working conditions. Bridgestone, for example, reported double-digit percentage increases in both revenue and operating profit for the first half of the year. The company recorded that sales were up by 25 percent compared to last year, reaching \$14.1 billion, while operating profit grew 13 percent, reaching \$1.54 billion.

Workers throughout the tire industry should organize quickly to defeat the efforts of the USW to impose a sellout. This requires the formation of rank-and-file factory committees at each plant, composed of the most trusted and militant workers, to campaign for a rejection of the pro-company agreements and prevent ballot stuffing. These committees should draw lists of demands based on what workers actually need, including major increases to wages and COLA protection against inflation, fully paid company health care and pensions, adequate time off and more.

A rank-and-file rebellion is increasingly brewing throughout the entire auto and auto parts industries, where conditions have grown intolerable. In this year's elections for president of the UAW, Mack Trucks worker and socialist Will Lehman is running to give voice and leadership to this growing movement. His campaign is calling for the abolition of the massive union bureaucracies, the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor, and for the formation of an international network of rank-and-file committees, uniting workers in every industry, in order to fight for the needs of the working class.

"I fully support the struggle of tire workers against both the companies and the USW bureaucracy," Lehman told the WSWS. "Their labor is a critical part of the production process, whether at Mack, Volvo, the Big Three, or elsewhere. They deserve and must have a decent standard of living. I encourage them to reach out to each other, communicate, and organize their own committees, and join this rank-and-file movement we're building."



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