

Strike blocked at key ammunition plant after media portrayed work stoppage as national security threat

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Local media reports indicate a three-year agreement was reached on Monday between 10 unions, covering about 500 Iowa Army Ammunition Plant workers. The previous three-year agreement expired last Friday.

No details of the agreements have been made public. The Middleton, Iowa plant manufactures large bore ammunition, anti-tank weapons and surface-to-air missiles for the US military, and is operated by American Ordnance LLC, a subsidiary of mega-conglomerate Day and Zimmerman. Included in the locals at the plant are the Teamsters Local 238, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150, and International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers Local 1010.

In the months leading up to the contract expiration, *Forbes* warned of interruptions to the supply of American weapons to Ukraine, including shoulder-fired anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, due to the US's aging weapons manufacturing infrastructure. The Iowa ammunition plant, which has been in continuous use since 1949, was identified as a potential "single point of failure" due to its age and long history of accidents, including major explosions, as recently as 2018. A June 2006 explosion killed two workers, Justin Friedrichsen and Steven Upton, and destroyed a building in the massive 19,000-acre complex.

Business leaders and capitalist politicians also placed strike action among the top threats. In order to apply pressure on workers to accept whatever agreement the unions and American Ordnance impose, *Forbes* raised the alarm about the national security threat represented by any work stoppage at the Iowa munitions plant due to contract negotiations, setting the stage for increasingly overt political attacks on workers

everywhere who want to combat exploitation, poor conditions and inadequate benefits.

Work in the ammunition plant is dangerous and relatively low-paid. In 2016, 274 Iowa Army Ammunition workers struck over health care, wages and pensions. One striking worker said at the time, "American Ordnance offers less compensation than the cookie factory down the road, which both pays better and has lower employee health premiums."

In the days leading up to the contract expiration this month, *Forbes* published claims that a work stoppage would be connected with Russian "meddling," and warned of the danger of outside influences and social media.

Forbes' Craig Hooper wrote, "Labor disputes happen. They are a normal part of America's labor history. But an extended fight would be a real problem. Nobody but Russia will win if this key western ammunition facility gets sidelined for months. Given Russia's prior efforts to destroy or degrade Ukraine's European sources of critical ammunition, interfering in a simmering U.S. labor dispute may well pose an irresistible target for Russia's vast cadre of clandestine influencers."

Promising investment in ammunition infrastructure if he is elected, Democratic candidate for Senate in Iowa, retired Admiral Mike Franken said, "American military might, when called upon, should not be constrained by a lack of resiliency at home."

Franken and *Forbes* only follow the ruling elite worldwide in preparing to slander workers determined to fight for the right to pay, health care, pensions, and decent conditions as "Putin's stooges." Attacks on

strikes and protests are becoming increasingly political as workers are told they must sacrifice for the latest “war effort,” and the reactionary corporate media slanders social opposition as meddling by foreign powers.

A global strike wave is underway, including national strikes by British rail workers, dockworker strikes in Greece and Germany, airline strikes at Ryanair and among South Korean truckers, and mass protests in Sri Lanka against unaffordable cost of living, which forced the resignation of the president.

Opposition is also growing among defense industry workers in Iowa and across the US. The trade union bureaucracy, working hand in glove with the White House, is playing a central role in preventing strikes and enforcing substandard contracts. Earlier this year, workers at Eaton-Cobham Mission Systems in Davenport, Iowa, rejected two contracts. Last month, the IAM union imposed an agreement on 2,500 St. Louis-area Boeing workers along the lines of an earlier deal which the union itself felt compelled to recommend be rejected. After the first agreement was voted down, the IAM scheduled a strike for August 1, but returned to discussions with the company and at the 11th hour, the strike was suspended.

In Ohio, Collins Aerospace workers were locked out after voting down an agreement. Shipyard workers in Newport News, Virginia and Pascagoula, Mississippi, who produce the bulk of the ships for the Navy, rejected sellout contract proposals late last year, only for the unions to come back and ram through similar deals at both locations.

The Middleton ammunition plant is just a few miles west of Burlington, where CNH workers are still on strike. It is also a short distance from the major BNSF rail terminal in Fort Madison. While workers at the major railroads have been without a contract for nearly three years, a White House-appointed board recommended an agreement that would keep wages below inflation, remove limits on individual health care contributions, and uphold unilateral control by management over brutal attendance policies.

The fighting potential of these powerful sections of workers must find expression outside of the political control of the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracies. This means the formation of new organizations, rank-and-file committees, that mobilize

workers independently of the unions and in coordination with workers across borders and sectors, uniting them in a struggle for the social rights of the working class.

But above all, workers must recognize that they are locked in a life-and-death political struggle against capitalist exploitation, the cause of the war. This is the significance of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia being used as a weapon against workers in Iowa.



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