

Sherwin-Williams paint manufacturing workers in Maryland strike

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20 December 2022

About 30 workers at the Engineered Polymer Solutions (EPS)/Sherwin-Williams plant in Williamsport, Maryland, have been on strike since November 21, fighting for wage increases that keep pace with inflation, better benefits and a reduction in work hours.

The workers belong to United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 171, which has over 1,000 members, including hundreds of workers at the strategically important Mack Trucks facility in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Workers at the plant produce resin and latex products which are then shipped to additional Sherwin-Williams facilities where color is added to finish the product.

UAW Local 171 representative Bobby Keller told Radio Free Hub City that the workers are striking due to inadequate wages and benefits. Pay increases remain fixed at 2.1 percent, in spite of 7 percent inflation. Workers are requesting wages and benefits comparable to a plant owned by the company in Illinois.

Travis Miller, shop manager at the plant, described a typical work schedule of at least 60 hours over six days, including four 12-hour days from Monday through Thursday. Miller also said that during earlier phases of the pandemic workers were required to work even more hours with little to no extra pay or benefits for their efforts, despite the potential of contracting COVID-19 and passing it on to family and friends.

Sherwin-Williams, a global paint and coating manufacturer, has refused to accept the demands for which workers are fighting. The company has operations in over 100 countries worldwide, pocketing annual revenue of almost \$20 billion in 2021, which places it at number 175 on the Fortune 500 list.

Julie S. Young, vice president of global corporate communications for Sherwin-Williams, issued a statement that the company had been negotiating with

UAW Local 171 since November 3.

The ongoing strike in Maryland is the third strike this year by workers against Sherwin-Williams. In February, 55 workers struck at the Bedford Heights, Ohio, plant. In July, workers struck for seven weeks at a facility in Kentucky.

The strike has gone almost entirely unreported in the local and national media, with the sole comprehensive report coming from the news website Radio Free Hub City. Only on December 14, more than three weeks after the strike began, the local *Herald-Mail* newspaper finally gave a brief report.

A search for updates on the strike on the UAW's own social media channels such as UAW Region 8 Facebook page turns up nothing. Its webpage is totally silent on the strike.

This is an isolationist tactic which plays into the hands of the company. On top of this, Sherwin-Williams keeps churning out products by using scab labor. Miller reportedly said in the local press: "non-union workers at the plant are doing their best to keep production going." In fact, the local kept workers on the job for a week after the expiration of the contract, giving the company time to stockpile materials.

During the New River Valley Volvo strike in Dublin, Virginia, the UAW bureaucracy pushed through a concessionary contract after workers had voted it down three times and refused to call out the membership in support.

Opposition to the sellout deal was spearheaded by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which sought to broaden the strike to the Mack-Volvo plants in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and in Hagerstown, where autoworkers were forced to stay on the job and paint scab parts to the benefit of the Mack-Volvo corporation.

While the UAW bureaucracy is doing everything possible to sabotage the fighting will of workers to win their demands, the working class across the US is in the midst of a number of high-profile strikes and a fraudulent election for UAW President in which the union apparatus refused to mail out ballots or notify workers about the election.

Over 1,100 workers have been on strike for the past seven months at CNH in Racine, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa. An even larger strike, lasting over a month, involves tens of thousands of teaching assistants, researchers and postdocs at the University of California system.

Pennsylvania rank-and-file autoworker and UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman opposed the rotten bureaucracy and called for democratic rank-and-file power on the shop floor. In response to growing support for this program, Curry and the UAW suppressed information about the election and the ballot itself.

Striking workers are in a strong position to win the contract battle by reaching out to their brothers and sisters at other Sherwin-Williams plants and to workers at the Mack-Volvo plants. A rank-and-file strike committee must be formed to lead the struggle.



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