

UAW isolating three-month strike by Sherwin-Williams workers in Maryland

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Thirty production workers at Sherwin-Williams have been on strike against the profitable international paint company for nearly 60 days at a plant outside of Hagerstown, Maryland.

The workers, members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 171, have been off the job since November 21. They are demanding livable wages and a reduction of work hours.

The company's workforce is being crushed under 60-plus hour work weeks and below-inflation pay raises of 2.1 percent. "[Eighty cents] is not a livable raise for the work we do, nor is it keeping up with the cost of living rising," said one striker on social media.

A striking worker's family member explained: "It's not just about the pay. They are also requiring them to work an insane amount of overtime, and [trying to] charge them a bunch for insurance while not compensating them for it.

"They [Sherwin-Williams' workers] are going to lose money by paying more for their insurance. And everything just keeps going up in price," she continued.

Wall Street investors have given the Fortune 500 Sherwin-Williams a "high" Earnings Quality Ranking (EQR), which represents company earnings for over half the year. It is expected that this will continue into the future: according to Zacks Investment, the earnings per-share forecast is forecast to increase in the next quarterly financial results year-on-year from \$1.34 to \$1.86.

Macrotrends reported that in the quarter ending September 30, 2022, the paint giant's net income increased 36.42 percent, or \$685 million. From 2018 to 2020, net income increased over 70 percent.

In December, the company sold 90 percent of its stake in its under-construction headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio for \$210 million, dubbed a "sale

leaseback." In a public statement, the company said, "This transaction provides Sherwin-Williams with additional liquidity to invest in its planned business growth, its employees and the surrounding community, all of which will greatly benefit the entire region."

As company revenue skyrocketed during the first two years of the pandemic, the production of paint never stopped and the workforce never received hazard pay or additional benefits for risking their lives.

A series of strikes have erupted at various Sherwin-Williams locations in the past year. In February, 55 workers struck at the Bedford Heights, Ohio, plant. In June and July, workers struck for seven weeks at a facility in Kentucky.

In spite of the determination of the rank-and-file, the UAW leaders overseeing the strike and negotiations are leaving workers out to dry, while they bide their time to hash out a sellout with management.

On January 8, UAW Local 171 officers invited David Trone, a Democratic House member, to visit the picket on January 9. Trone, a billionaire owner of Total Wine & More, has faced a series of indictments due to various shady practices associated with his business. Nevertheless, the UAW gave him a space to grandstand as a "friend of workers." "We see what inflation has done to families across the country. The small paltry raise that's been offered by management is just not going to cut it," declared Trone in front of reporters. Trone also voted last month with the overwhelming majority of House members to ban a strike by 120,000 railroad workers.

At Sherwin-Williams, the UAW is standing by while management employs scab labor. In a statement given to the local press, Travis Miller, shop chair of Local 171 at the plant, said "non-union workers at the plant are doing their best to keep production going."

While the UAW ecstatically promoted Trone's visit on its Facebook page, little else about the strike has been uttered publicly. UAW Region 8's Facebook page has refused to disseminate any information regarding the current strike. On its webpage, it has two meager postings.

The UAW is also isolating the strike at Case New Holland (CNH), where 1,100 farm equipment manufacturing workers have been on strike for nearly nine months. CNH workers voted "no" on the company's "final" offer earlier this month, determined to carry on their struggle for an adequate standard of living.

The UAW is also violating workers' right to vote in the union's national leadership election, the first round of which was held last fall, through a massive voter suppression campaign which was exposed in a protest lodged by Will Lehman, a rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker. Lehman ran on an openly socialist platform of abolishing the UAW bureaucracy by developing rank-and-file committees on the shop floor to fight for the demands and interests of workers.

In order to fully express the power of workers on strike, a rank-and-file committee must be formed at Sherwin-Williams to take this struggle forward.



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