

# Striking Dakkota auto parts worker in Chicago speaks out: “We are not making living wages”

Marcus Day, George Marlowe  
8 August 2024

*Work at Dakkota? Fill out the form at the end to tell us what you are striking for and to discuss forming a rank-and-file committee. Your identity will be kept confidential.*

The strike by roughly 450 workers at Dakkota Integrated Systems in Chicago entered its second day Thursday, after workers voted down a United Auto Workers-backed contract proposal by 87 percent last weekend. The workers, members of UAW Local 3212, are fighting for major improvements to wages, time off and working conditions.

The walkout has quickly impacted production at the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP), which relies on a just-in-time supply chain model for many of its parts. Dakkota workers build front and rear suspensions for the Ford Explorer and Lincoln Aviator SUVs that undergo final assembly at CAP.

The evening B crew shift at Ford Chicago was canceled Thursday. UAW 551 Plant Chairman Alan “Coby” Millender earlier announced on Facebook that the morning A crew would only work five hours, but many workers reported they had still not been sent home hours after that time.

“Right now we are not making living wages,” a striking Dakkota worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

I’ve been with Dakkota for about nine months. The conditions that we work under are very stressful and strenuous. We work 12-hour shifts doing very difficult work, which includes hand-lifting parts each weighing over 30 pounds, lifting at least 400 individual parts a day, not counting the other departments. No earned vacation, low wages, \$16.80 per hour, which is 60 cents above Chicago’s minimum. Machines are always breaking down, and the staff treats you with no respect.

Under the UAW’s proposed contract, he said,

It will take almost five years to reach \$21 an hour. No earned vacation, one extra sick day added. This is so disrespectful to our workers with all the work we do for this company. We need everyone to support us.

Workers have been outraged over Dakkota’s reported use of strikebreakers. A parts worker from another plant who visited the picket lines Thursday told the WSW, “Just left Dakkota, and there are indeed scabs working.”

There is widespread opposition by Ford Chicago workers to the possibility they will be forced to handle scab-made parts from Dakkota.

One Ford Chicago worker said he was disgusted that “Ford would rather run slow, get a few cars, and bring in scabs to work rather than shut down production.”

A second Ford worker said, “Me and the co-workers I spoke with support their decision to strike 100 percent. Dakkota is just another example of corporate greed and the need for workers to fight back. I wish we would’ve held out longer and stuck to our demands in our recent strike.”

A third Ford worker added, “We shouldn’t use those parts” but said that many workers were afraid they would lose their jobs if they refused because the UAW “won’t back us.”

Indeed, the UAW bureaucracy and the current administration of President Shawn Fain has already demonstrated repeatedly that it will aid the companies’ strikebreaking efforts.

During a strike by Clarion battery workers in Holland, Ohio, last year, the UAW apparatus ordered workers at Big Three plants to continue handling scab-made batteries, despite widespread support among workers for a ban on products from the struck plant.

Later in 2023, the UAW under Fain called a series of ineffective “stand-up strikes” of Big Three autoworkers, which kept the vast majority of UAW members on the job and producing profits. The UAW shut down the strikes immediately after they announced tentative agreements, before they had shown workers the contract proposals or held votes on them.

Workers at other plants have written to the WSWS warning about the betrayals they have experienced at the hands of the UAW bureaucracy. “UAW sold us out on a better contract and refused to support us if we chose to strike,” said an auto parts worker at the Lear Seating plant in Hammond, Indiana, which also supplies Ford Chicago. “Threatened us with outbidding ourselves out of a job.”

On Thursday, the UAW’s national Facebook account posted about the strike at Dakkota, claiming that chair Andra Rush had “grabbed the spotlight as a forward-thinking employer in the

past,” before stating the company was now denying workers a “fair shake.”

In reality, Rush has previously been hailed by the Democratic Party for her identity as a woman and descendant of the Mohawk Nation, while overseeing some of the most brutal sweatshop conditions at parts companies, such as Dakkota and earlier at Detroit Manufacturing Systems. She was a featured guest of Obama at his 2014 State of the Union address, promoted as an example of the “recovery” of the auto industry.

As the WWSW wrote in 2017, “Her fortune, currently estimated in the hundreds of millions, rests on the backs of a low-wage labor force, held in check by the United Auto Workers.”

Fain and the UAW leadership are no doubt planning to announce a “new” tentative agreement at Dakkota at the earliest opportunity. At a Lear Seating plant in Wentzville, Missouri, last month, the UAW shut down a strike by workers after just three days, later telling workers that the International would refuse to resume a strike if workers rejected the deal.

Workers at Dakkota are striking for the common interests of all autoworkers: far higher wages, adequate time off, decent and safe working conditions, and more.

But the success of the struggle depends on workers taking control out of the hands of the pro-corporate union bureaucracy. Dakkota workers should organize rank-and-file strike committees and send delegations to Ford Chicago and other nearby plants to appeal for a collective fight.

At Ford Chicago, workers should hold discussions and organize around the demand for a ban on all parts from the Dakkota plant during the strike.

### **“Reject the scab parts!”**

“They sent in scabs today and yesterday,” the striking Dakkota worker told the WWSW. “A busload, 30 of them, yesterday. Today they had another busload of about 40-50. They haven’t been trained for it.

“We did hear that the Ford workers, there’s talk going around they don’t want any parts from scabs. That’s getting louder.

“The company is just giving us a slap-in-the-face offer. They made a lot of promises earlier in January that they’re not keeping.

“Dakkota made a billion dollars last year, but it’d take five years for us to reach \$25 an hour. By the time you reach that, cost of living is going to change, and inflation is going to go up. It’s entirely too long. We supply these big car companies that make all this money. It’s totally disrespectful.

“We’re constantly working on the line. Sweating in this plant all day, telling us to work, work, work, but there’s no benefits. I might as well work at McDonald’s, compared to the work we do.

“People here are working two jobs to make ends meet. I can send you three months of my paycheck. Last three months I haven’t made over \$400 a week. It’s impossible. People were holding on waiting for the new contract. We have people who have been there 6-7 years and are making \$21 an hour. And you tell

them they’re going to get a dollar raise? No.

“You get one vacation day per year that’s given to you. The company offers you a vacation once a year. Every July the company shuts down for a whole week. That’s not vacation time. That’s the company’s shutdown time. It’s crazy.

“Our union strike committee today is the same strike committee that was on the last contract. We got the same guys that allowed all this to happen.

“UAW leaders get new houses. We never even see them in the building. When I asked the president in front of the union workers that I’ve got no union book and he brushed me off.

“Half the members don’t have a shift, don’t get a text message, don’t get any message on their phone about what to do. I’m sure everybody’s not going to be there.

“We were supposed to strike weeks ago. The union out of the blue sent a text message: ‘We have a tentative agreement and you guys are working.’ We didn’t approve of that! They just did that on their own. They made us work another two weeks.

“Their proposal, we shot it down. We are out here now on the picket line. For two weeks, you knew they were training temps. They trained over 200 temps.

“With the lack of communication the union was issuing, a lot of people didn’t vote because they didn’t know what day it was on. I know at least 20 people that didn’t get a chance to vote on this one. They probably would have voted ‘No’ too.”

Addressing himself to his fellow workers at Ford, he concluded, “Brothers and sisters at CAP, turn around and look at all your brothers at Dakkota. We’re working hard, and we’ve been treated unfairly. Help support us. Don’t let Dakkota get away with it. We’re not making living wages. Don’t accept those scab parts, brothers and sisters.

“Support us out in the streets in 100 degree weather. Everybody is fighting for better wages for their families. Reject the scab parts!”



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