

“Now is the time to stand up and fight back”: Striking Dakkota parts workers speak from the picket line

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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. We also encourage Ford Chicago and other area workers to send in statements of support. Your identity will be kept confidential.

Over 450 autoworkers at the Dakkota Integrated Systems parts plant on Chicago's Far South Side entered their fourth day on strike Saturday against poverty wages and poor working conditions.

The Dakkota workers, members of UAW Local 3212, voted down a UAW-endorsed tentative agreement by 87 percent last Saturday, after an earlier overwhelming strike authorization vote. On Wednesday, they went on strike at noon. But the company had been training temps to work as scab labor in the event of a strike, which the UAW did nothing to stop.

At the same time, workers at the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP), which Dakkota supplies, are growing outraged that they are made to handle scab parts and continue working under orders from the United Auto Workers (UAW) leadership.

In 2023, Dakkota made an estimated \$1.1 billion in revenue, according to job placement firm Zippia. The company is privately held and does not publicly release earnings.

Dakkota workers at a Louisville, Kentucky, plant also rejected a “last, best and final” offer by the company in June. In March, the company announced its Canadian plant in Windsor, Ontario would be subject to closure, affecting 138 workers.

WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters visited the picket lines Friday, speaking with workers about the issues motivating their strike.

“When I started the conditions and the benefits and everything was alright,” said a worker. “I started off at \$15 an hour with 12 hour shifts. Then we worked through the pandemic and there were some promises made that were never kept. I feel like we were already in a bad contract. We still persevered and everybody still came to work and worked hard, but the majority of the people here were at the seniority stage so we were capped at about \$20 an hour.

“We want a fair contract. Who wants to come to work miserable because you know that what you’re making isn’t going to take care of what you need to take care of? I feel like we are two levels behind the cost of living. It hasn’t changed since the pandemic for us. In no way.

“In the most recent contract, they were offering some things like more vacation days and time off, stuff like that. But the pay just wasn’t right. It was crumbs. For new people they offered \$17 an hour. And for those of us that have been here they only offered us a \$2 increase. That’s nothing.”

Speaking on the exploitation of the workers by the company, he added, “The companies are making billions easy. They’re not building the cars, we are. We are the ones putting out 700-800 new cars daily. They’re not doing that. And then they want to give us crumbs and think it’s okay? It’s not okay.”

Ford workers: “Why are we building with scab parts?”

Anger has continued to grow at Ford Chicago against the handling of scab parts. One outraged worker said on social media, “So, every part we use is assembled by a scab.” Another asked, “Why are we building with scab parts?” Yet another said, “Where is the solidarity in this? This is embarrassing.”

Another asked, “Why don’t we just go back on strike on behalf of Dakkota?”

Workers at Ford Chicago should take the initiative and organize rank-and-file mass meetings to vote on and enforce a ban on scab-made parts, to enact genuine solidarity with their brothers and sisters at Dakkota.

At the same time, striking Dakkota workers must be on alert against the inevitable next attempt at a sellout by the UAW bureaucracy, which has repeatedly betrayed struggles at the Big Three and in parts plants like Lear and elsewhere.

By forming rank-and-file strike committees, Dakkota workers can share information and mobilize to expand their fight to meet their demands, including a 50 percent wage increase, an eight-hour work day, better working conditions and more.

“This strike really opened my eyes”

Other striking Dakkota workers spoke on the abysmal pay and working conditions they faced.

“I’ve worked here for three years,” one worker said. “I’m fighting for better rights, better pay and for our wages to go up with the cost of living. Workers at McDonalds in Chicago make more than us. I’m a factory worker, a fork-lift driver. It’s supposed to be a skilled position, but they don’t label us that so they don’t have to pay us. Your job is not fighting for you, it’s fighting you.

“This strike really opened my eyes. They brought temps in day by day just to replace our jobs. That was mind blowing.

“The offer we rejected was pennies. It was basically pitiful. When you add up the retro pay, it’s 50 cents for three to four months.”

“I work about 42 hours a week, 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. And then on the side when I’m off, I do Grubhub, Uber Eats and Amazon Delivery. I do that on the weekends. Between all the jobs I work, I do 60 hours a week. I’m away from my family and I’m working more than I’m home. I’m a husband and a father. I would get a better job, but I put so much time here. I was holding out for the next contract to see what we can get. We deserve

more. Dakkota is a billion-dollar company. And Ford is a multibillion company.

“Let’s all stick together. They need us. I heard they’re sending scab parts to the Chicago Assembly. Our brothers and sisters there are saying they don’t want to use these parts.”

“Now is the time to stand up and fight back”

Another worker with a year at the plant said, “We’re fighting for a better, fair raise. In order for us to survive now we have got to have two incomes for our families to survive. We should be able to stand on our two feet. That’s why we’re here as one to get a fair contract.”

She added, “A lot of my coworkers are behind on their car notes or they bought a house and they don’t know what to do. They’re getting loans out and getting more in a deeper hole. That’s not right for us. We’re the ones that do the work for these corporations. They should treat us better.

“The corporations are greedy. They’re making billions. What we’re asking is not for much. These corporations have been stealing from us. They don’t pay us much. We make the products. Without us they’re nowhere. They need us and they need to pay us. We should get a 50 percent or more raise, I agree. That \$16-17 they’re trying to give us, four years from now we will be underpaid. We should be over \$30 an hour to survive and be stable with inflation. Right now I have to ask myself if I put gas in the car or do I want a hamburger. It’s food, gas or rent now. You have to choose in order to survive.

“With Trump and Biden and this and that, it’s a corrupt system too. Whether it’s a Democrat or Republican, it’s all corrupt. They don’t speak for us. They’re just looking at the upper class and the corporations, not those who make the products like us workers. We’re here on strike to support one another. Now is the time to stand up and fight back, not just at Dakkota, but everywhere.”

“Don’t let your company run you over”

Veteran workers at the plant also spoke out against the contract and the brutal working conditions they face.

“I’ve had numerous injuries, equipment breaking down,” she said. “I have a wedge compound fracture in my spine. They have cut our workstations. I’m doing four workstations where we used to have two people. It’s happening all over. They cut our manpower down.

She added on the pay freeze, “I’m a master builder here. I’ve been capped off at \$20.10 per hour, so going on three years now I have not had a raise. None of us that are senior employees have.”

Inflation, she said, has been “horrible,” adding, “We live in ‘Crook County’, Chicago. Everything is astronomical here. I’m a widow and my child is grown, but these other people here that are single moms, I don’t know how they’re doing it! To pay for daycare and everything else... I don’t know how they’re doing it.”

Speaking on what rank-and-file workers are demanding, she said, “We need to get \$30 an hour over the four years but I want \$25 right off the bat just to deal with inflation, to pay for gas, because gas has gone through the roof here, everything has gone through the roof just to pay my bills.”

She also appealed to workers at Ford Chicago to stand with the striking Dakkota workers and refuse to handle scab parts. “I want to thank them for all their help. They’ve got our backs 150 percent, and they’re not happy about putting those scab parts on those cars.”

“When Ford went on strike,” she said of the strike last year, “we went with them. We got laid off when they shut down CAP. We do the same work they do, so we were on strike too. Our contract wasn’t up yet but we went on strike with them. We should support each other. These companies are trying to take advantage of us. Don’t let your company run you over.”

The UAW’s so-called “stand-up” strikes at the Big Three last year did not achieve any of the central demands of rank-and-file workers, contrary to the claims of “historic” agreements by UAW President Fain, Biden, and the corporate media. The companies continued to make massive profits and have laid off thousands of workers in the aftermath of the contract. Just this week, Stellantis announced it would be permanently laying off over 2,400 permanently at the Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit, intensifying a jobs bloodbath in the auto industry.

“Support us!”

Another veteran worker with 10 years spoke out against the contract and appealed for support from other workers, including Ford workers.

“I’ve been there 10 years,” a senior worker said. “Over the years we are actually putting through a lot more work but the company is not willing to pay. They are having us do more work but for less pay.”

Conditions at the factories are frequently unbearable, he observed. “It is always hot there. They never turn on the AC. There is never anything done for us. It’s always something for the company but never anything for us.”

“I’m a forklift operator, I do a lot of the loading and unloading every night. I drive a forklift that has a broken seat on it that hurts my back. It’s been three months and there’s been nothing. They still haven’t fixed it. I have reported it multiple times. It’s actually mandatory that I fill out this paperwork for it. So somewhere somebody sees it but no one has fixed it. So I have been dealing with it for three months.”

There have also been layoffs which have impacted the workload of many of the workers at the plant, he said, “which is how we end up doing double work. But it’s for the same pay. It doesn’t make sense.”

The cost of living in Chicago and northwest Indiana has been skyrocketing, crushing the living standards of many workers in the region. For that reason, he said, “We want to see a much better pay increase, a fair pay. I live in Indiana. I watched gas increase 80 cents overnight, and what they’re offering over a number of years is not what I have lost to gas prices alone. The offer that they are making is not close to what I lost overnight.”

“We make just enough to afford to make it into work so we can keep the company running, but we can’t pay our own bills. So, we are working to keep the company rich, but where is our part? We have families. I’ve got grandkids and a son that just went to college. I need to be able to support my family.”

He was also outraged that the company has hired strikebreakers. “They actually brought in temps and wanted us to train them to do our job. That was a slap in the face. We make one of the most important parts of a car. We build the suspensions. That’s a safety issue if anything goes wrong.”

“Support us,” he appealed to workers in Chicago and around the world. “We’re trying to get a fair share for our work. If you support us, it would be greatly appreciated.”



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