

Dakkota auto parts workers reject second UAW sellout agreement: “The fight is on”

Marcus Day
22 August 2024

Work at Dakkota, Ford or in the auto industry? Fill out the form below to get involved with the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network at your plant.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is holding a meeting this Sunday, August 25, at 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, “For global action to defend jobs at Warren Truck and around the world!” To register, click here.

Striking Dakkota Integrated Systems auto parts workers in Chicago voted by 61 percent Tuesday and Wednesday to reject a second pro-company tentative agreement brought back by the United Auto Workers.

Around 450 Dakkota workers have been striking for more than two weeks for far higher wages and improved working conditions, after rejecting the UAW’s first pro-company contract proposal by 87 percent the previous weekend.

The rebellion by Dakkota workers against the sellout deal is a major rebuke to the UAW bureaucracy, which tried to ram it through in a snap vote. It further exposes the fraudulent claims of UAW President Shawn Fain to be leading a struggle for workers’ interests.

But as recent history has repeatedly shown, the UAW apparatus will not respond to Dakkota workers’ “no” vote by seeking to “negotiate” a better deal. Instead, they will seek to starve and wear workers down on the picket line, while planning to force workers to keep voting on essentially the same contract until it comes out the “right” way, as they did at Lear Hammond, Clarios, and elsewhere.

If there is going to be a real fight to win the strike, workers themselves must organize it. **Dakkota workers should organize discussions on the picket lines today and tomorrow and move quickly to develop the Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee.**

The urgent task is to expand the strike throughout the region, connecting it with the struggle to defend jobs at Stellantis and across the auto industry. In particular, they must link up with workers at Ford Chicago, who should refuse to handle scab parts, and with Stellantis workers at Warren Truck near Detroit, who are fighting against mass layoffs and the threatened closure of their plant.

Rank-and-file Dakkota workers should discuss a set of fighting demands based on what workers actually need, such as a 50 percent wage increase, two full weeks of vacation, and more.

“Now that we voted, we need to stand even stronger,” a veteran Dakkota worker told the WSWs late Wednesday. “We need to go big.”

“The fight is on,” another striking worker said.

The Dakkota factory supplies the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly Plant. The UAW bureaucracy has ordered workers at Ford to continue working and handling parts made by scabs during the strike, despite increasingly angry calls by Ford workers to take solidarity action. Last week, rank-and-file committees of workers at Ford Chicago and Dakkota issued a joint statement calling for a ban on scab parts.

The UAW bureaucracy is already seeking to sow demoralization and pass the blame from itself onto workers, claiming some workers have begun crossing the picket lines.

If that is the case, responsibility lies entirely with the UAW apparatus, which is starving workers on the picket lines on just \$500 a week, not to mention placing workers in extreme financial precariousness by agreeing to poverty wages in earlier contracts.

Along with the demand for a ban on scab parts, rank-and-file workers at Dakkota and Ford Chicago should insist that strike pay is raised to \$1,000 a week. The UAW apparatus controls a strike fund valued at over \$800 million, which has been built from workers’ dues money and must be used to provide them with the resources needed to win their struggle.

“We can barely afford to pay our bills”

Both contract proposals brought back by the UAW would have imposed poverty wages, forcing workers to continue working two or even three jobs to survive, as is often the case currently. Wages would have started at \$16.80 for new-hires and ended at \$18 by 2028. Senior workers would have made \$21 to start and \$25 by the end of the contract.

“I have been working for this company for 17 years,” a Dakkota worker told the WSWs Wednesday. He continued:

All I have received is change from this company. Never have we ever gotten a dollar raise from the company when times are hard. Now everything has gotten so expensive we

can barely afford to pay our bills or buy groceries to feed our family, which is ridiculous.

It takes gas to get to work, and gas prices have also gone up. Everything is outrageous now, so with that being said we need more money. We have only one paid time off, two weeks of vacation, when we have to give one week back to Ford Motor Company, so actually we are only getting one week off for vacation, when some people in this company are barely getting that.

While the UAW apparatus and corporate media have virtually blacked out information about the strike, workers who have learned about it through the WSWS have written in to voice their support.

A Dakkota worker at the company's Lansing, Michigan plant told the WSWS:

As a fellow Dakkota worker, Chicago, I share your pain and anger. For four years that I've been at Dakkota we have been royally screwed over. I had worked here previously in the past, nine years ago, I am also a second generation Dakkota worker, and I can tell you it's a night and day difference.

“Dakkota workers are a battalion in a class war”

The strike at Dakkota is taking place as Fain and the UAW apparatus are desperately trying to head off a rebellion by workers at Stellantis over mass job cuts. At the same time, the bureaucracy is going “all-out” (in its own words) to promote Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, the candidates of the big business, pro-war Democratic Party.

Stellantis has announced it is permanently cutting 2,450 positions at its Warren Truck Assembly Plant near Detroit. The cuts are part of a growing jobs bloodbath in the global auto industry, as the companies seek to shed workers and ruthlessly cut costs as they transition to electric vehicle production.

In the US, Stellantis, Ford and GM have all cut thousands of jobs this year, contradicting the claims by Fain and the media that last year's Big Three contracts were “historic.” In reality, the agreements have given the companies a free hand to carry out mass layoffs, which UAW officials, such as Vice President Rich Boyer, have admitted they knew were coming during the contract talks last year.

Will Lehman, a rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks and socialist candidate for UAW president in the 2022-2023 elections, told the WSWS Thursday:

The Dakkota workers are standing up for their interests, and in doing so, they're having to defy the UAW

bureaucracy. They join a long line now of workers who have rebelled against UAW sellouts, including Volvo Trucks, Deere, Dana, Lear, and Mack Trucks, where I work.

The critical issue is for Dakkota workers to understand that they're fighting not just one particularly greedy company. Dakkota workers are a battalion in a class war. On the one side are the corporate executives, the major banks, and the union bureaucracies, who are trying squeeze even more profit out of workers. On the other side is the global working class. Whether you're an autoworker in Chicago, Mexico, Italy, or China, you're fighting against the giant corporations, and for the same common class interests.

Lehman concluded:

Dakkota workers have taken an important step forward. Now that momentum has to be developed. I encourage workers to get involved with the Dakkota and Ford Chicago rank-and-file committees. Join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, a global movement of workers.

“We're fighting for a better life”

“We're fighting for a better life,” a veteran Dakkota worker said.

The cost of living has gone up. Everything. They want to pay us peanuts while they don't have to struggle for mortgages, groceries, car bills. They're not being fair. I'm in it for the long haul. The more they want to play this game. The angrier I'm becoming.

I've been following all the articles you guys have been publishing. I'm very pleased with them. They're very factual. They're giving us the truth in the reporting. It's showing a side to the people of what's really going on. And how the union leaders are betraying the workforce.

The problem with this strike is there is no strategy. There's no game plan. This needs to be bigger.



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