

“Everybody on my line voted to strike”: Daimler Trucks Detroit Axle workers deliver 99 percent mandate for walkout

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In a near unanimous vote, hundreds of workers at Daimler Trucks Detroit Axle plant have authorized the United Auto Workers to call a strike when the five-year contract for an estimated 500 workers expires next Friday. According to UAW Local 163, Detroit Axle workers voted by 99 percent to strike during voting on Wednesday.

The powerful strike vote expresses the growing mood of militancy among workers across the US on the eve of the inauguration of Donald Trump and his government of corporate oligarchs. It takes place as 5,000 nurses, doctors and midwives in Oregon are conducting the largest strike in the state’s history .

Like millions of workers, Detroit Axle workers want a substantial increase in wages and cost of living adjustments (COLA) to cover the costs of housing, food and other essentials. The workers also want equal wages with the 3,200 Detroit Diesel workers who produce engines, integrated powertrains and emission systems at the same Daimler Trucks Detroit Manufacturing Plant complex.

The workers at the wider plant produce critical components for several of the company’s major commercial vehicle brands, including Freightliner and Western Star trucks and Thomas Built school buses.

Under the contract the UAW agreed to in 2020, assembly and material workers hired at Detroit Axle before 2009 maxed out at \$24.50 an hour. Those hired after 2020 came in at the poverty wage of \$15.50 an hour and only reach \$24.50 after working seven years. By contrast, an assembler at Detroit Diesel is currently paid \$34.72 and will max out at \$36.83 in May 2027, under the terms of the six-year agreement signed by UAW Local 163 in 2022.

“We’re underpaid, and we want wages equal to the guys on the diesel side,” a worker with 21 years at the plant told the WSWS. “I started at diesel but was laid off and got hired on the axle side. At first, we were making better wages but over the years, in contract after contract, we fell further and further behind.”

Workers say some fast-food restaurants pay more than the giant trucking company. “We’re being paid crap wages, and

the company is making billions,” a young worker with two years at the plant told the WSWS.

“We want better wages, more paid time off and better working conditions,” said a young worker hired two years ago. “I started at \$15 an hour and now I’m making \$16.50. A lot of us are forced to live at home with our parents because we can’t afford to move out. At first, I was able to stay on top of my car note, insurance and cellphone bills, and it was feasible. But after a few missed paychecks because of production shutdowns and mini-layoffs, I’ve haven’t been able to bounce back. Two of my co-workers are working second jobs just to make their car payments and other bills. They don’t sleep and try to catch up on weekends. Luckily, there haven’t been any accidents at the plant.

“I grew up with my dad and other relatives working in the auto industry, and when I was younger, I thought they were rich and had money spilling out of their jeans. When I had a chance to apply for a job here, I jumped on it. But then I learned which side of the plant I was going to work on. Because of the low wages, we have a lot of problems with hiring and training, and we are always short-staffed. The UAW officials don’t really fight hard for us. They write down our complaints and tell us to vote for them and they’ll make it better at contract time.

“Everybody on my line voted to strike. I hope all the Detroit Diesel workers come out with us because that is the only way to show the company that we mean business.”

In 2023, Daimler Truck Holding AG reported a net profit of \$3.93 billion, up 42 percent from the previous year, and \$2.35 billion in the first three quarters of 2024. The company has maintained strong profits in North America, allowing it to offset losses in China, Germany and other countries.

The UAW International has produced several videos highlighting the miserable conditions Detroit Axle workers face and contrasting that to Daimler’s massive profits and multi-million-dollar executive payouts. One video revives the slogan from the 2023 UAW-Big Three negotiations, “Record profits mean record contracts.”

But the reality is UAW President Shawn Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy did not win “record” contracts for

150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers. Defying the near unanimous vote by the membership for an all-out strike, Fain launched his bogus “Stand Up” strike, which kept the majority of workers on the job producing profits for the automakers while never calling out more than a third of the membership.

Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy then pushed through agreements based on the lies that part-time workers would be converted to full-time, tiers abolished, and jobs guaranteed. No sooner had the contracts been ratified than the automakers launched a mass attack on jobs, firing thousands of part-time workers and laying off thousands more, including those who had been rolled over to full-time positions.

Heavy truck workers have been particularly hard hit by betrayals. This includes the sellout of the five-week strike by 4,000 Mack Trucks workers in Pennsylvania and Maryland, 7,400 workers at six Daimler Truck plants whose strike vote was ignored by the UAW before it rammed through a concessions contract, and Detroit Diesel workers themselves.

In May 2022, Detroit Diesel workers voted down a UAW-backed sellout contract only to be forced to re-vote on the same deal. It included a 10 percent pay raise and did nothing to address the decades-high inflation rate, and no cost-of-living protection. The contract maintained the divisive two-tier pay structure, only reducing the progression time to six years.

A real struggle requires that Daimler Trucks workers take control of the struggle away from the union apparatus. As the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* stated earlier this week:

If there is going to be a real fight to end poverty wages and secure a decent standard of living for axle workers, then the rank and file must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands.

This means building a rank-and-file committee composed of the most trusted and militant workers who will not bow to the pressure of the UAW bureaucracy and their corporate masters. This committee should map out demands based on what workers actually need and want, not what management and the UAW bureaucrats says is “realistic,” i.e., based on the profit requirements of wealthy stockholders.

This should include:

- An immediate \$10 an hour across-the-board increase
- Fully indexed cost-of-living raises
- Eliminate the divisive two-tier wage structure and temp work
- Restore all pensions
- No layoffs. Secure real job security

Workers should be on guard against efforts by the UAW bureaucracy to extend the contract deadline or announce a last-minute deal before they organize a snap vote without workers

having the full details of the agreement. Wednesday’s strike vote was a mandate from the membership for a walkout when the deadline expires. The rank and file must enforce the principle of “No contract, No work!”

Several workers raised concerns that the UAW officials might call a phony “Stand Up” strike which only involved the Detroit Axle workers while Detroit Diesel workers were ordered to cross their picket lines. “A lot of us raised at the union meeting that the Detroit Diesel workers must honor our picket lines, but we didn’t get a straight answer.” Referring to the sellout of the Big Three autoworkers, a worker said, “I’ve got friends who work at GM, and they were pissed off about the contract they got.”

A rank-and-file committee that unites all axle, diesel and transmission workers must fight for all-out strike action by the whole Detroit Manufacturing Plant and a ban on the handling of scab parts by UAW members at all Daimler-brand truck and school bus plants.

Mass meetings and protests should be organized with Big Three and auto parts workers throughout the metro Detroit area. A special appeal should be made to Daimler, Mercedes, VW and other autoworkers in Germany and throughout Europe who are facing massive job cuts.

“In our history classes in high school, I learned about the strikes workers carried out in the 1800s and early 1900s. Strikes are good, but they are hard,” the young worker with two years at the plant said. “Last year, workers at Boeing went on strike, which was good because their airplanes are falling out of the sky. Now, you have Trump coming back in. He’s threatening to take over Greenland and deport immigrant workers. You learn about checks and balances in school, but they want to get rid of that. There is going to be a big upheaval here, especially with the young people joining the auto industry, and not making enough to live.”

Are you a Detroit Axle or Detroit Diesel worker? Tell us your thoughts about the current fight in the form below.



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