

UAW officials defy strike mandate by Detroit Axle workers, move to ram through sellout deal

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The United Auto Workers bureaucracy has contemptuously defied the near unanimous vote to strike by 500 Daimler Trucks Detroit Axle workers and is now planning to ram through a pro-company contract against the resistance of the rank and file over the next few days.

On January 22, Detroit Axle workers voted by 99 percent to walk out when the contract expired at 12:01 a.m. on Saturday, January 25. UAW Local 163 officials, operating under the direction of UAW President Shawn Fain and the UAW International, ignored the strike mandate and told members first that it was extending the existing contract hour by hour, and then set a deadline of 9 p.m. on Sunday.

Late Sunday night, after keeping workers in the dark for hours, the local suddenly announced it had reached a tentative agreement, without releasing any details to the membership. A spokesperson at UAW Local 163 said local union officials were waiting for a response from the UAW International before they scheduled a date for the ratification vote.

“They agreed to a contract but there are no details yet about everything,” a Detroit Axle worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “I attended the union meeting Sunday, and they said they were close to getting a contract and that they were going to meet with the company at 2 p.m. By 9 p.m., they came to an agreement.”

Any deal reached behind the backs of the members and without any direct action to halt the corporation’s production and profits cannot be anything but another sellout. Rank-and-file workers should prepare now to demand the release of the full agreement, not just the bogus “highlights,” campaign to defeat it by the widest margin and ensure the integrity of the ratification vote by exercising oversight by a committee of trusted workers.

The UAW’s decision to run roughshod over the democratic will of the membership confirms the warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network, and the call for Detroit Axle workers to form a rank-and-file committee to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW bureaucrats and put it in the hands of shop floor workers.

The union bureaucracy’s actions provoked widespread anger among workers, who have seen their real income plunge under the UAW’s previous five-year deal with Daimler Trucks North

America. “No one is happy and everyone on our Facebook page is letting them know and asking what was the point in us voting on a strike if they were just going to extend it?” one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* Saturday morning.

On the Detroit TransAxle UAW Local 163 Communication Page, workers reacted angrily to the announcement of the contract extension by local committeeman Zach Harper who implored workers to “please remain patient” and claimed, “We’re all in this together.”

“Right, you said Friday 12 midnight and now Sunday night at 9pm that’s close to 3rd shift going to work,” one worker replied, adding, “The Union said if they don’t want to sign or give us all our demands [we] strike.”

Others wrote:

“Why did we vote to strike?”

“NO AGREEMENT=NO AXLES”

“Thought it was said NO EXTENSIONS.”

The Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network, which works under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) issued a statement directed to workers attending a Local 163 union meeting on Sunday. It denounced the decision to extend the contract for violating “the will of the membership,” which voted 99 percent in favor of striking, not extending the contract.

It continued:

For five long years, our wages have been eroded by inflation while Daimler Trucks has made billions in profits—profits they couldn’t earn without our labor. That’s why we must strike now and call on all Detroit Diesel workers to honor our picket lines and halt production.

Who benefits from extending the contract? Corporate management, not us. If they haven’t met our demands after months of negotiations, what makes us think they will suddenly change their stance without hitting them where it hurts? No corporate executive will take us seriously if we threaten a strike and then back down.

The statement urged workers attending the union meeting to

“overturn the illegitimate decision by UAW officials to extend the contract and take control of this fight. We do the work, pay the dues, and it’s our jobs and livelihoods at stake.”

First, the statement said, workers had to have a common agreement on the demands they had to secure before ratifying any contract.

The statement suggested that these should include:

- An immediate \$10 pay increase and COLA to make up for lost wages due to inflation and equalize pay with Detroit Diesel workers

- The restoration of company-paid pensions and the end of all tiers

- For rank-and-file control over line speeds and job safety

The statement continued:

If we strike, we strike to win. We must map out a strategy to win the broadest support from other workers as possible. This means shutting down the entire manufacturing complex and calling on Freightliner, Western Star, and Thomas Built workers to refuse handling any engines, axles, and transmissions from this plant. We should also appeal to Daimler workers in Germany, who face similar struggles.

All the videos and rhetoric about “Record profits mean record contracts” from UAW officials have been nothing but hot air. UAW President Shawn Fain and Solidarity House bureaucrats know there is widespread anger in metro Detroit over their sellout of the Big Three contract sellout in 2023 and massive layoffs at Warren Truck, Ford Rouge, and other factories. They’re trying to prevent a broader fight, but that’s exactly what we need. We must unite with GM, Ford, Stellantis, and other workers to protect all our jobs.

Indeed, a strike by 500 Detroit Axle workers would have an immediate impact on Daimler Trucks North America’s operations. The 1,500 Detroit Diesel workers at the same manufacturing complex, who are also members of UAW Local 163 but work under a separate agreement, have expressed support for their fellow workers. If they honored the Detroit Axle workers’ picket lines, as many Detroit Diesel workers intended to do, this would cut off the production and shipment of engines, transmissions, axles and other components to all of Daimler’s manufacturing facilities in North America.

This would quickly bring production to a halt at Freightliner and Western Star truck and Thomas Built school bus factories in North Carolina, Tennessee, Oregon, Georgia and Oklahoma, along with Saltillo and Santiago Tianguistenco, Mexico. In 2022, the UAW sold out the struggle by 7,300 workers for improved wages and conditions at these US truck and bus plants.

A walkout, as the statement said, would also encourage resistance by 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers, along with tens of thousands more in the auto parts industry, against the massive wave of job cuts the auto bosses have implemented since

the sellout of the 2023 contract battle by UAW President Shawn Fain and the union apparatus. This includes the firing of thousands of temporary part-time employees and mass layoffs at Warren Truck, Toledo Jeep, and the Kokomo transmission plants by Stellantis.

General Motors is firing thousands of salaried staff, and parts suppliers Mobis and Kuka (Toledo, Ohio) Forest River, Pridgeon & Clay (Indiana) are slashing hundreds of jobs. Added to this are the closures of the Webasto Roof Systems (Michigan) and Bridgestone truck and bus tire (Tennessee) plants.

There is nothing more the UAW bureaucrats fear than a growing movement of the working class against their corporatist relations with big business. On top of that, Fain is trying to prove to Trump that the UAW can keep the lid on working class opposition as it rips up the democratic and social rights of the working class on behalf of the oligarchs in charge of his government.

Indifferent to the threats posed to the whole working class by Trump’s dictatorial executive orders and deployment of military troops to round up and deport immigrant workers, Fain has promised to “work” with Trump to promote economic nationalism and trade war measures to disorient workers and divide and weaken them. Bitter experience has shown that the America First nationalist poison peddled by the UAW bureaucracy, Trump and the Democrats only leads to further job cuts and wage and benefit concessions, in the name of making corporations in the US more “competitive” than plants in other countries.

Detroit Axle workers can only fight the German-based transnational corporation by uniting with their class brothers and sisters in Germany, Mexico and around the world in a common fight to defend the jobs, wages and working conditions of all workers. This means joining and fighting to expand the work of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The outcome of this struggle depends on what rank-and-file workers do. Workers should demand the release of the full agreement, organize discussions and a campaign to defeat any contract that does not meet their demands.

To join the fight for rank-and-file power, fill out the form below.



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