

# Indianapolis Rolls-Royce workers authorize strike

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17 February 2025

Rolls-Royce workers in Indianapolis, Indiana authorized a strike last Thursday by a 99.5 percent vote. The contract for roughly 800 workers in United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 933 expires February 26. The vote shows that workers are determined to wage a fight to end the hated wage and benefit tier system, expand pensions, and oppose rising healthcare costs.

Rolls-Royce, a transnational corporation, supplies primarily military and civil aerospace. They have over 160 military and 250 commercial customers. These workers, based on their job classification, start at anywhere from \$26.84 to \$29.37/hr. per the 2020 contract, working under multiple tiers. Meanwhile, profits were \$2 billion last year, up 144 percent, according to the UAW.

While the local union called for a “yes” vote for strike authorization, no confidence should be placed that it will actually wage a fight for workers’ demands. The UAW is again campaigning around the slogan of the “stand up strike” in 2023 that was used during the Big Three autoworkers strike to divide workers and block any real impact on the companies’ bottom line.

Rolls-Royce is a primarily civil aerospace and power systems corporation based in Britain, with operations throughout the globe, but like most companies, it is seeking to profit off the drive to global war. Recently, it landed a £9 billion nuclear contract with the UK Ministry of Defense. The American Rolls-Royce secured a \$74.7 million deal for 28 V-22 Osprey engines to support the Navy and Marine Corps in 2023 and then invested \$1 billion in modernizing the Indianapolis plant for further advanced manufacturing for the Air Force.

This year, the US Department of Defense awarded Rolls-Royce in Indianapolis \$695.3 million to “support, program management, integrated logistics support, sustaining engineering, and maintenance and repair, reliability improvements, configuration management, and

site support for the MV-22, CV-22, and CMV-22, AE1107C engine series.”

This massive spending increase in investment comes as thousands of federal workers are to be fired from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), Department of Education (ED), Department of Energy (DOE), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and many others. These workers are not being fired for poor performance, but the oligarchy is purging government spending to finance tax cuts for the ruling elite as well as increased military spending.

Following Vice President JD Vance’s speech at the Munich Security Conference, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the bringing together of the far right on both sides of the Atlantic is aimed at dismantling social programs, educational institutions and democratic rights of the working class to remove all barriers that stand in the way of enriching the billionaire oligarchs.

## Lessons from Allison Transmission

Workers have taken to social media to voice their support for a strike and broader struggle against Rolls-Royce. One worker posted, “PSA Long term agreements with suppliers are bankrupting them. RR knows this and do not care when they get parts well below cost. Go get em...”

Another comment referred to the role of the UAW in not filing paperwork in time for a strike, “make sure they file the proper paperwork, unlike when Allison UAW ‘conveniently’ forgot to ... after a 96 percent majority vote to strike.” In response to a comment that blamed

workers for voting for Trump who “hates unions,” one worker said, “uhh were you not paying attention to what the previous admin did to the trade unions? Protip they busted a strike and forced people back to work,” referring to the railroad and dockworkers strikes shut down by the Democratic Party.

The Rolls-Royce strike authorization comes almost a year following the ramming through of a sellout contract at neighboring Allison Transmission. Workers at Allison waged a three-month struggle after they unanimously voted to strike, only to be blocked from walking out at the 11th hour by the UAW bureaucracy. The “historic contract,” as UAW President Shawn Fain characterized it, had production workers starting at \$20 an hour, up from their original \$14.50, still lower than what is considered a living wage in the Indianapolis metropolitan area. The UAW claimed the ending of tiers. In fact, the “in-progression” period to reach top pay was merely reduced from eight to three years. This contract also included memorandums of understanding for an Alternative Work Schedule that abolished the right to an eight-hour day. The most significant language was for “Plant 14,” to dispose the workforce at the will of the company to produce military tank transmissions. This was as the war in Ukraine was escalating, with tanks already being sent by the US and other members of NATO, and alongside the unfolding genocide in Gaza.

It is notable that workers had initially voted “no” on almost the same contract a month prior, only to have Fain and Region 2B Director David Green intervene to block strike action and wear down workers as they continued to work under an extended contract.

While workers were preparing for strike action, President Biden celebrated Thanksgiving with the co-founder of Carlyle Group, who purchased Allison from General Motors. At that time, the WSWS stated, “Carlyle is not only a vicious corporate predator, but it has also long had the most intimate ties with the military-intelligence apparatus, particularly in connection with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The private equity firm has employed numerous war criminals from both capitalist parties, including former Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci, once its chairman, and former CIA director and Pentagon chief Leon Panetta, a highly paid ‘consultant.’ Both George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush were directors of the company or a subsidiary.”

## **Build the Rolls-Royce workers rank-and-file committee!**

In response to the UAW bureaucracy defying the rank-and-file strike vote, workers at Allison Transmission developed the Rank-and-File Committee of Allison Transmission Workers. Their statement declared, “We need to take control of the situation ourselves. We saw what happened to our brothers and sisters at the Big Three and at Mack Trucks. After Fain said he ‘squeezed everything’ out of the company, GM brags about their \$10 billion stock buybacks and saw their stock price go up 10 percent.”

They called on their coworkers to kick out the bargaining committee and Region 2B Director David Green, and replace them with a committee of trusted militants, elected by the rank and file.

In addition, the statement called for emergency meetings of Allison workers to begin preparation for a strike to uphold the principle, “No Contract, No Work!”

Rolls-Royce workers must draw sharp lessons from the struggle at Allison Transmission and at the Big Three. Shawn Fain was brought in to reform the image of the UAW, not to change its role as a mouthpiece for the auto companies. Within a month following the end of the “Stand Up” strike in 2023, hundreds of workers were permanently fired from Sterling Heights to Kokomo to Belvidere. With the recent police operation at Michigan Assembly in Wayne, Michigan, management and the UAW are colluding to create a police state atmosphere in the plants. To fight for their demands, workers must develop rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW bureaucracy to fight for their demands. This requires the committee coordinate with its coworkers at Allison and other plants, in defense of jobs and working conditions.



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