

Cummins engine and parts workers in Wisconsin and Indiana vote down concessions contracts

Bill Shaw
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Workers are continuing a three-month strike at the Cummins plant in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, after they rejected a second contract proposal brought back by the United Auto Workers by a vote of 46-34 on June 2.

The defiant stand follows the overwhelming defeat of a pro-company agreement by their fellow workers at the much larger Cummins plant in Columbus, Indiana on May 23. Cummins workers in Columbus—members of the Diesel Workers Union (DWU)—voted by a massive 97 percent (834-28) to reject their proposed contract.

The DWU was forced to hold a strike authorization ballot on June 5-6, which workers voted to approve.

Worldwide, Cummins employs over 75,000 workers. It manufactures diesel engines that power vehicles, boats, and generators across a wide range of industries, including the military, as well as producing related components such as drivetrains and braking systems.

The Oshkosh plant makes drivetrains for military and construction vehicles, with contracts in recent years to supply the nearby Oshkosh Defense factory with axles for armored trucks. The Columbus plant, for its part, supplies diesel engines for the Dodge Ram Heavy-Duty pick-up trucks, which Stellantis produces at its Saltillo, Mexico, factory.

Around 90 workers at the Oshkosh Cummins plant have been on strike since March over wages, the company's attempts to introduce temporary workers and a dramatic increase in mandatory Saturday hours. They also have been fighting for affordable healthcare, job security and against the introduction of a tier system. Workers have been without a contract since the previous one expired in late January.

Striker Doug Golla, a 30-year worker at the Oshkosh plant, told the local student newspaper *Advance Titan*: "They want to fill the place with temp workers. They want accumulated

vacations, things like that."

Workers' anger has been fueled by the immense wealth they produce being hoarded by the company's executives and shareholders. The company reported record revenue of \$34.1 billion in 2024, with Cummins CEO J.W. Rumsey taking in a pay package of \$21.86 million. "Cummins like other big corporations never thinks how they got where they are today the workers has made them what they are today!," one worker posted to Facebook. "Strike!!!"

Official talks between UAW Local 291 and the company will not resume until the end of June. In the days before the most recently rejected contract, union officials had described closed-door discussions with management as "a little bit more productive," an indication of their complete indifference to workers' needs.

Cummins has been operating the Oshkosh plant with scabs since workers walked out on strike. It also eliminated striking workers' ability to access their health insurance.

As a result, Golla noted, "They're not having good times in there. They're dropping axles, they're not building good things."

The factory has historically produced components used in military vehicles assembled by Oshkosh Defense, also located in Oshkosh. The workers at that plant are members of UAW Local 578, with over 2,000 members. Thus, the UAW workers at Oshkosh Defense are almost certainly handling scab-made parts, with no objections registered by UAW leadership, let alone efforts to call out their members throughout the city and the region more broadly.

The Oshkosh and Columbus workers at Cummins face similar issues, and yet the UAW and DWU apparatuses have not coordinated strike action at the two factories, thus isolating the struggles. Neither the UAW nor the DWU has even alluded to the other's struggles in official statements or interviews.

Workers must draw the necessary conclusion following the defeat of the most recent agreements: In order to win their

demands, a new strategy is necessary, one which breaks the isolation of the strike imposed by the union bureaucracy.

Cummins workers in Oshkosh and Columbus should elect rank-and-file committees, led by the most trusted and militant workers, to link up with workers at Oshkosh Defense, Stellantis, Allison Transmission and elsewhere and coordinate common action.

Such committees can provide a means for workers to put forward demands based on what they actually need and a plan of action to fight for them. Among the most pressing tasks is for workers to fight an immediate ban on handling any scab-made parts, as an elementary requirement of real working class solidarity.

After announcing the strike authorization vote, DWU officials were quick to try to tamp down workers' expectations. In a letter to members, it stated: "An authorization to strike does not mean we will strike immediately. This only means our membership has given their consent to the DWU Bargaining Committee to authorize a strike."

The UAW, as well as other unions, have carried out ineffective "solidarity" events, with workers from UAW Local 1102 in Green Bay volunteering their time to join UAW Local 291 on the picket line for a day. The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO has asked its workers merely to sign a "solidarity petition."

Cummins and Oshkosh Defense are major defense contractors that are essential to the ruling class' expanding war plans targeting the Middle East, Russia and China. Cummins has a \$400 million-plus agreement to supply diesel engines to the US Army through 2028, while Oshkosh Defense has at least \$2 billion in ongoing contracts with the US military.

The rejection of multiple contracts at Cummins is part of a growing wave of struggles by workers in the defense industries, as the corporate oligarchy and war profiteers ramp up military production and squeeze as much as possible out of workers.

At Lockheed Martin, roughly 900 workers in Orlando, Florida, and Denver, Colorado, walked out for a month over poverty-level starting wages and a slow pay progression system. The strike was shut down by the UAW apparatus with a deal that keeps workers underpaid in a company reaping enormous profits from imperialist war. The contract runs until 2030, effectively locking workers into long-term concessions.

At Pratt & Whitney, nearly 3,000 workers who make commercial and military jet engines struck last month after voting down a concessionary agreement brought back by the International Association of Machinists (IAM). The IAM bureaucracy eventually forced through the company's

demands after isolating the strike for three weeks, with over half of workers walking out of the ratification meeting in disgust.

The administration of UAW President Shawn Fain is playing a leading role in attempting to chain workers to the US war machine. Ever since becoming UAW president in 2023, Fain has touted factories in the US as the so-called "arsenal of democracy", a militaristic propaganda slogan from World War II, when the UAW agreed to strike bans and worked to suppress opposition.

First pledging to send workers "to war" for Biden, Fain has since thrown his full backing behind Trump's reactionary tariffs and trade war measures, peddling the lie that Trump—the would-be American *Führer*—will defend "American jobs" at the expense of those in Mexico and other countries. But the working class is in fact objectively united in a global network of production, with every vehicle and product of a complex international supply chains, as the interdependence between workers in Columbus, Indiana, and Saltillo, Mexico, demonstrates.

From the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine to the preparations for war with China, the escalation of military conflicts across the globe depends on increasing production output from the factories in Oshkosh and Columbus at the expense of workers, as the ruling class is simultaneously engaged in increasingly desperate attempts to prop up the entire capitalist system. The Trump White House, meanwhile, is the center of an active and unfolding conspiracy to overturn the Constitution. These issues are inter-related as the US seeks to maintain its position in the world through military might, and dictatorship at home in response to its accelerating economic decline.

Workers' struggles against a unified and increasingly militaristic and desperate ruling class cannot be won through isolated strikes at individual factories, especially when the factory is a key link in the military-industrial complex. Neither the Democrats nor the union bureaucracies, which depend on and thus are committed to growing preparations for war, are any help or ally.

Instead, workers must take the struggle into their own hands and form rank-and-file committees at every factory. These committees must then interlink with others across the globe in the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees (IWA-RFC), laying the basis for workers to coordinate their struggles and secure their needs.



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