

“The whole working class needs to strike”: Libbey Glass workers continue walkout in Toledo, Ohio

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Workers at Libbey Glass in Toledo, Ohio, are continuing a walkout that began August 23 after they overwhelmingly rejected the company’s “last, best and final” offer. The contract would have stripped workers of overtime, hiked healthcare costs, gutted seniority rights and delivered inadequate pay raises.

The 900 office and production workers at the Toledo operations are members of International Association of Machinists (IAM) Lodge 1297 and three locals of the United Steelworkers (USW). They produce a wide range of glass tableware for one of the largest glass manufacturers in the world, which employs over 6,000 globally.

The three-week strike is the longest since a two-and-a-half week-long walkout in 1974. Libbey workers last struck in 2016, in a walkout that lasted two weeks. Since then, they have been forced to accept major givebacks, including during the company’s 2020 bankruptcy restructuring, when the IAM and USW pushed through a concessions-laden contract. The company is now privately held and reportedly profitable, yet management is determined to make permanent the concessions while driving workers even harder.

Far from seeking to broaden the fight, the IAM and USW bureaucracies are isolating it, corralling workers behind a strategy of pleading with management and appealing to the same Democratic politicians who have repeatedly attacked workers. Among these is Ohio Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, who postured on the picket line while just three years ago voting to ban the strike by 120,000 railroaders and impose a White House-brokered contract that workers had already rejected.

“They just want to take everything away from us”

Libbey workers who spoke with WSWS reporters voiced their anger not only at management but also at the political establishment and union bureaucracy.

A veteran Libbey worker explained: “Instead of moving forward on the last contract, they want to take everything away from us, including overtime pay. They don’t want to give us anything. Instead of going from last contract and moving forward just giving us a cost-of-living raise or something like that, they’re not doing that anymore.

“They just want to take. They want to increase healthcare cost, but that’s not the biggest problem. They want to take away your seniority. People have worked here, you know, most of their lives, from 20 to 40 years or more. They just take away. In 2020, during COVID, they took away the healthcare insurance for the early retirements. We haven’t had a real contract since 2019, so they just want to take everything away from us.”

He linked the assault on workers to the broader political situation, denouncing Trump’s crackdown on immigrant workers, including the ICE raid at a Hyundai plant in Georgia last week. “I saw in Georgia that South Koreans came in to help build a plant, and they sent ICE in there to remove the people who were building the plant and teaching more than 8,500 workers in Georgia how to work. They just locked them up and put a kibosh on the whole plant.

“It’s the same thing here. Libbey used to be a family-oriented company, and it’s just corporate greed, all across the board. Nobody is stopping this. The Democrats aren’t, the Independents and the Republicans are surely not going to stop it.”

The worker condemned Trump’s attacks on democratic

rights, including the deployment of troops to US cities. “That’s against the law, the Constitution. What Trump does, he takes a hammer to all these programs, beats them up and then he says, ‘See, it doesn’t work.’”

He agreed with the need for a general strike to defend the working class. “Yes, yes, that’s what we should do. People can’t stay silent. Look what the Nazis did.”

A younger worker described the brutal working conditions. “It already takes at least 10 years for new hires, who came in at \$15-16 an hour, to get to the top pay scale. We’re also on a seven-day swing shift. So you are working seven days on first shift, two days off, seven days on second shift, two days off and seven days on night shift. It’s crazy. You can go right down the street, get paid \$20-something an hour for a straight shift job. Why would anyone take this?”

The low wages make it “impossible” for younger workers to make ends meet, he said, adding: “The only way of making it possible is working overtime. It’s the only good thing about here, and they’re trying to get rid of that and the contract. … They’re basically trying to get rid of anything a union can do. They’re trying to make it non-union it seems like.”

The worker blasted the four separate unions in the plant for their inability—and unwillingness—to organize a united fight. “It’s hard for all four of us to talk on the same page, and fight against one company. … It seems like we need a union against the unions.”

Another veteran worker emphasized the need for collective action across the working class. “The working people in this country produce everything and are treated like crap. The rich don’t want to pay taxes. If that means the whole country has to strike, then that’s what we have to do. Trump has no power if we don’t give it to him—or anyone else who tries to take our rights. The whole working class needs to strike. We need to put the rich people in their place. They have nothing without us.”

labor practice” (ULP) strike rather than a contract strike, claiming the company has not bargained in good faith. This is a legal tactic that allows the unions to shut down the strike once management can show a pretense of “good faith” bargaining—without any guarantee of winning workers’ demands.

The critical task now is to break through the isolation imposed by the IAM and USW. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWARFC) calls on Libbey workers to immediately form a rank-and-file strike committee, democratically controlled by workers themselves, to take the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy. Instead, power and decision making must be controlled by workers on the shop floor.

This committee should formulate and fight for these non-negotiable demands, including:

- **Restoration of all concessions** given up during the 2020 bankruptcy, including retiree healthcare.
- **Substantial wage increases** tied to cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) to combat inflation.
- **An end to mandatory overtime** and the hated seven-day swing shift schedule.
- **Protection of seniority rights** and job security for all workers.
- **Full transparency** in all negotiations, with workers informed and in control at every step.

Such a committee would fight to expand the strike, uniting Libbey workers with autoworkers at Jeep and Dana in Toledo, as well as oil refinery workers, logistics workers, teachers, and every section of the working class coming into struggle against wage cuts, layoffs and authoritarian attacks on democratic rights. Only through a common fight, waged on an international scale, can workers secure substantial wage increases, restore lost benefits and put an end to corporate exploitation.

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



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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Break the isolation! Form a rank-and-file strike committee

Libbey workers face not just a fight against one company but against the entire corporate and political establishment, backed up by the union bureaucracies that have repeatedly sabotaged their struggles.

The IAM and USW have called the strike an “unfair