

Libbey Glass strike in Toledo at crossroads

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The nearly 10-week strike by 675 Libbey Glass workers in Toledo, Ohio, is rapidly approaching the longest in the company's history—the two-and-a-half-month walkout in 1974. The workers struck August 23 after voting overwhelmingly to reject the company's "last, best and final offer," which contained sweeping concessions, including cutting overtime pay, the implementation of mandatory 12-hour shifts, the arbitrary cancellation of lunch breaks and subcontracting to non-union employees.

The workers, members of United Steelworkers (USW) Locals 59M, 65T and 700T and International Association of Machinists Local 1297, are also determined to recoup the \$32 million in givebacks the unions agreed to in 2019-20. At that time the Toledo-based glassmaker announced plans to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection due to the economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Just prior to this, Libbey awarded over \$3 million in bonuses to its executive staff.

In 2020 and 2021, the unions agreed to give up back-to-back 2.5 percent wage increases that had been guaranteed in their labor agreements, and on top of that to impose a 5 percent wage cut until the end of the extended agreement in 2024, according to USW District 1 Director Donnie Blatt. "We also gave up retiree health care in that agreement that the retirees never did get back. We froze the defined benefit pension, and they [the workers] also agreed to pay more premiums for their health care," Blatt said.

In addition, USW worked with Libbey and Biden's US Department of Energy to hand over a \$45 million taxpayer-funded grant to help the company restructure and reorganize. In September 2024, Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown announced a \$721,778 Department of Energy "investment" to help Libbey replace four regenerative furnaces with two larger hybrid electric furnaces, "improving efficiency, reducing carbon emissions, and ensuring the region remains at the forefront of global glass production."

The union-backed agreements reportedly included a "snap back" provision that would supposedly restore

some of the concessions if workers met certain production quotas. Far from restoring any of the givebacks, the company is demanding even more cuts in its first contract since exiting bankruptcy in October 2020 with the aim of "significantly reducing operating costs." In December 2020, Libbey closed its Shreveport, Louisiana plant, putting 450 employees out of work.

Libbey reportedly made \$155 million in gross profits in 2024. It is under pressure, however, from investors to increase profit margins, which have been hit by the 25 percent tariffs Canada imposed on drinkware, barware, foodservice glass in retaliation for Trump's trade war measures. In June 2025, Trump's Department of Energy canceled billions in previously approved industrial decarbonization grants, including funding for Libbey Glass in Toledo.

"They just want to take everything that we've worked for since the beginning maybe of the union," a veteran worker with nearly 40 years at the plant told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters. "They just want to take everything, which is not fair to us."

Asked if she saw the current strike as part of the broader struggle of the working class against Trump's attack on federal workers, gutting of social programs and deployment of troops to major US cities to round up immigrants and crush internal opposition, she said, "The working class is being attacked, not only at this company and not just this year but in past years.

"There have been multiple strikes at different companies, and the companies don't want to yield to what the people want. It's our right to have our wages increased and cost-of-living increases, better insurance. That's what we work for, not just to get a paycheck and keep the company going."

When asked what she thought of the oligarchs that Trump speaks for who do not think workers have any rights, she responded, "We work because we want to live too. We have a right to take care of our families just like they do."

Another striking worker discussed recent workplace

deaths, including Stellantis workers Ronald Adams Sr. at the Dundee Engine Complex in April 2025 and Antonio Gaston at the Toledo Assembly Complex in August 2024, and USW members and brothers Ben and Max Morrissey, who were killed in an explosion at the BP-Husky refinery in nearby Oregon, Ohio, in September 2022.

“It goes back to the old days like the coal miners in Pennsylvania, where workplace accidents were commonplace. Whether it’s at Jeep or anywhere else, in this day and age, people should not be dying or getting injured. We have dangerous jobs. This isn’t working at McDonald’s. We’re making glass at 2,000 degrees. It takes training and hard work, and this company thinks they can just run over and crap on us. No, we’re not taking that.

“All the hard work you put in for this company, and then they go around and won’t even give us a minimum 3 percent raise, when the national inflation average is 3 percent. After the last strike, the union members gave up some of our wages to help the company out of bankruptcy, and this is the thanks we get. They don’t even want to give us a fair minimum. It’s just a slap in the face.

“I don’t know if the company is being emboldened by Trump or not. I couldn’t care less what the rich think, I’m out here standing up for what I believe in. Even though my bank account is nothing like theirs, I’m going to stay out here until we get what we want.”

The determination of rank-and-file workers stands in stark contrast to the inaction of the USW, IAM and United Auto Workers bureaucracies, which have isolated the strike and done nothing to mobilize working class opposition throughout Toledo to stop the company’s strikebreaking efforts.

There are more than 20,000 USW members in the glass industry, including at Ardagh, Corning, O-I (formerly Owen-Illinois) and other companies. The USW has not only opposed an industrywide strike against Libbey’s precedent-setting demands, it has kept roughly 2,800 O-I workers on the job in Ohio, California, Illinois, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia for nearly seven months after the March 31 expiration of their labor agreement.

Instead of broadening the strike, the union bureaucracy is promoting local and state Democratic Party politicians, including Ohio Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, who voted to block the strike of railroad workers in 2022 and impose Biden’s pro-company deal, which they had previously rejected. At the same time, the USW

bureaucrats have made it clear they are willing to accept even further concessions to get a deal to end the strike.

“We’ve already dropped a lot of stuff that we really wanted. And we didn’t want to, but we did. And they’re still not, they’re not budging,” Adrian Martinez, the recording secretary for Local 59, told the *Toledo Free Press* earlier this month. “It could be another month. Could be another two months, I don’t know. First, we got to get back to the table. That’s the first thing we’re trying to do.”

The courageous fight of the Libbey workers is at a crossroads. If rank-and-file workers do not take the initiative, the labor bureaucracy will starve workers into submission and push through another sellout. That is why a rank-and-file strike committee must be formed to end all backroom negotiations, outline the non-negotiable demands of workers for the full restoration of all concessions and substantial improvements in wages and benefits, and rank-and-file control over the pace of work, scheduling and safety.

This committee must break the isolation of the strike by sending pickets to the Toledo Jeep Complex, Dana Driveline, Mercy Health St. Vincent Medical Center and other work locations to build support for solidarity action to stop Libbey’s strikebreaking and win workers’ demands. This must be combined with a battle to defend immigrants and all basic social and democratic rights against Trump’s bid for dictatorship.

For more information on how to build a rank-and-file committee, fill out the form below.



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