

Libbey Glass workers defeat USW bid to sell out 3-month strike in Toledo, Ohio

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Are you a Libbey Glass worker? Fill out the form at the end of this article to get information and assistance in forming a rank-and-file committee.

In a courageous act on Wednesday, Libbey Glass workers in Toledo, Ohio decisively defeated the attempt by the United Steelworkers International Union to ram through a pro-company contract to end their three-month strike on management's terms. Despite management's threats to replace strikers and the hardships of enduring a long strike with few if any strike benefits, workers remained steadfast in their opposition to management's demands for sweeping new powers over scheduling, forced overtime, subcontracting jobs, grievance procedures and work rules.

The national USW bureaucracy reportedly forced the vote over the heads of local union officials, who would not bring it back to the membership because they knew it would be soundly defeated. Although the USW last week acknowledged management's "bad faith unwillingness to agree to a fair contract," national union officials insisted "We knew we could not just sit back and say nothing, so we met with Libbey in an effort to end this strike."

This was followed by the announcement of snap votes immediately after three separate "informational meetings" at a downtown hotel, which the USW scheduled for different times to intentionally keep members of the three USW locals at the plant divided.

But USW District 1 Donnie Blatt and other USW national official were met with a torrent of opposition at the first meeting of Local 65T members, with Blatt describing the informational meeting as going "not well," according to local WTOL 11 reporters.

According to some workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* the vote to reject the contract at the first meeting was unanimous. Shortly afterwards, USW officials texted out a message to Libbey workers:

The proposed contract was voted down by Local Union 65T at the 9:00 meeting. As we have told the Company, there will be no return to work unless all Locals ratify. Therefore, there will be no further votes today. Members are welcome to stop by the hotel to discuss the proposal and have questions answered, but the 12:00 and 3:00 votes are cancelled.

Supporters of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and the WSWS distributed a statement to workers calling for a rejection of the sellout deal and for workers to take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the USW bureaucracy. The statement exposed the union bureaucracy's claims of substantial wage increases, noting that this concealed the fact that the deal included 14 separate usages of the phrase "at management's discretion," giving Libbey a "blank check for management dictatorship."

"The contract will give them the right to sideline or outright fire older, higher-paid workers at the warehouse and other locations," a veteran worker with nearly three decades at the plant told the WSWS before the vote. "They are turning to temp workers to get rid of the guys with benefits. They want nothing but casual workers so they can say, 'Hey Jimmy, you don't like it here, go get another job.' And then they can go out and hire another Jimmy."

"It's not just happening here at Libbey or in Toledo. It's happening all over America. They want the working class gone. Some guys say, 'I won't go into the factory, I'll be an accountant or pharmacist.' But they are using AI to get rid of jobs like that too."

"It's heading back to the time when workers had to fight in the streets, like the Toledo Auto Lite strike in 1934, which my grandfather was part of. The old methods

we've been using aren't getting us anywhere, so we are going to need some new methods."

A retired worker who came to the meeting with her son, who has worked at the plant for more than a decade, said, "The pension I'm living on sucks. It's disgusting what Libbey is doing, and I can't believe the USW International told workers to accept this garbage."

A veteran worker on the picket line denounced the contract proposal for banning "sympathy strikes." He explained, "We have three steelworker union locals and one machinist local in here. The language in the contract would leave it open for any union to cross the other union's picket lines. If anyone goes out, the other unions would have to cross the line, which we've never done before."

The Toledo-based company is one of the largest producers of glass tableware products, with a global workforce of nearly 10,000 producing for North America, Latin America, Asia and Europe. The strike by more than 500 workers in Toledo began August 23 after workers overwhelmingly voted to reject the company's "last, best and final offer" and is now one of the longest walkouts in Libbey's 132-year history.

This is also the first contract for members of USW Locals 59M, 65T and 700T and International Association of Machinists Local 1297 since the unions agreed to \$32 million in givebacks during the company's 2020 bankruptcy restructuring. These included back-to-back 2.5 percent wage increases guaranteed in their labor agreements for 2020-21 and a 5 percent wage cut through the end of the extended agreement in 2024. The unions also gave up retiree healthcare benefits and agreed to freeze defined benefit pensions and higher premiums for healthcare.

The company no longer files public reports with full net income figures since becoming a privately held entity (Libbey Glass LLC / LG Parent Holdco) during bankruptcy. But it reported \$786 million in 2024 revenues, down 3.3 percent from the year before, largely due to falling consumer demand in the US and Canada, uncertainties over the impact of Trump's tariffs and the administration's cancellation of Department of Energy grants for a multi-million-dollar furnace upgrade project to reduce climate-altering emissions. The company and its wealthy investors intend to extract these costs from workers and will no doubt intensify its strikebreaking operations after the failure of the USW bureaucracy to push through this deal.

The defeat of the contract is an important but only initial

step. The most dangerous illusion would be to believe that rebuke of the International would lead to change in their treacherous policies. On the contrary, Blatt & Co. will only double down on their efforts to starve workers into submission.

That is why Libbey workers must form a rank-and-file committee to take the conduct of the strike into their own hands; to draw up their non-negotiable demands and outline a strategy to win them. This includes appealing for direct support from workers at Jeep, Dana Driveline, Clarios Battery, Cleveland Cliffs, the oil refineries, Mercy St. Vincent, ProMedica and other work locations in Toledo to organize mass picketing and demonstrations and put an end to Libbey's strikebreaking operations and win this struggle.

It is clear Libbey is taking its lead from the Trump administration's war on the working class, including the deployment of the ICE gestapo and military troops to US cities to "fight the enemy within," the gutting of food stamps, public education, Social Security and Medicare, and the massive destruction of jobs through tariffs and the weaponization of AI and other technologies.

This strike can and must become the beginning of a broader mobilization of the working class against both corporate-controlled parties, the labor bureaucracy and the capitalist system they defend.

To sustain this fight, Libbey workers must have sufficient income paid for by the USW apparatus' more than \$2.2 billion in assets. The enormous salaries of union bureaucrats like Donne Blatt and outgoing USW President David McCall and incoming head Roxanne Brown must be immediately cut and the bureaucracy abolished so these resources can be used to defend workers' livelihoods.

Fill out the form below to get information and assistance in forming a rank-and-file committee.



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