

After 7 weeks on the picket line, chemical workers face strike breaking by Brulin Holding Company in Indianapolis

Kevin Reed
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Workers at Brulin Holding Company in Indianapolis, Indiana have been conducting a determined strike since October 3 against the management of the chemical cleaning supplies and equipment company.

The workers are demanding significant wage increases. The members of Teamsters Local 135 walked out after Brulin offered a pathetic three percent wage increase after not having any raises for the past three years.

Workers told reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* that the company has been bringing in scabs at much higher wages. Entry level wages for workers at Brulin are \$21.50 per hour; the company is currently paying \$25 per hour to bring in the scab workers.

Workers on the picket line also expressed hostility to the wage offer from the company and called it “insulting” proposals and a disregard for their rights.

When WSWS reporters arrived at the picket line, officials from Teamsters Local 135 attempted to stop the strikers from speaking and explaining their struggle. This is an unmistakable sign that, after seven weeks on strike, the fight of Brulin workers is in jeopardy. It must be understood that workers are fighting both the company and the union apparatus that is isolating the strike and preparing a betrayal of the determined struggle.

In order to take forward their fight and win their demands, strikers must begin to organize among themselves and establish a rank and file committee that will take actions independent of the union bureaucracy, which is strangling their strike.

Brulin Holding Company, founded in 1935, is a specialty chemical manufacturer based in Indianapolis, which focuses on cleaning processes and facilities

maintenance solutions. The company developed a strong regional and national presence in chemical manufacturing. It manufactures cleaning chemicals and maintenance solutions for buildings, healthcare, food service, and industry.

Current annual sales are estimated between \$119 million and \$133 million depending on the source, with some variation year to year. Brulin has employed as many as 245 workers and its brands include Brulin and Patco Food Safety, which focus on the commercial maintenance, healthcare, and industrial markets.

The Teamsters filing of unfair labor practice (ULP) charges against Brulin signals that the union bureaucracy is directing the struggle of the workers through the courts and not toward the mobilization of the working class. There are 14,000 members of Teamsters Local 135 covering workers in the airline, packaging and warehousing sectors in the greater Indianapolis area from Lafayette to Shelbyville and Terra Haute to LaPorte.

The Teamsters bureaucracy is blocking the mobilization of the members within the local and the working class more broadly in Indianapolis to support the strike at Brulin. Aside from a perfunctory news report on Facebook, an afternoon rally on October 7, and a phone campaign urging supporters to call Brulin’s offices, Teamsters Local 135 has not published an article about the strike on its website. Instead, the Local 135 leaders are telling workers to place confidence in the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to defend their rights.

Consistent with the Teamsters bureaucracy’s historical record, Brulin workers are being isolated, and measures needed to expand or escalate the struggle are

being blocked. The union bureaucracy has kept the strike local, focused on the NLRB filing, talked about “unity,” but offered no way forward for the fight against Brulin.

The struggle by Brulin workers is part of a growing rebellion by the entire working class against decades of attacks on jobs, wages and benefits combined with a new offensive by the capitalist owners to intensify the exploitation of workers and strip away what is left of basic rights. The corporate and financial oligarchy has made it clear that they will stop at nothing to increase their wealth and impoverish the workers in every industry.

Within this scenario, the union bureaucracy is the bought and paid for agency of the capitalist oligarchy and functions as an industrial police force that exists to contain the growing movement of workers and keep it from escalating out of their control.

Meanwhile, the union bureaucracy functions as political props for the Democrats and Republicans, the two parties of big business, and seeks to subordinate the struggle of workers to capitalist interests. For example, the president of the Teamsters, Sean O’Brien, is a supporter of the fascist Republican Party and went to the White House during the recent government shutdown to support President Trump’s attacks on funding of SNAP benefits for 42 million people.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, advocates for a fundamental change in the trajectory of the strike: Brulin workers must take leadership of their struggle by forming their own rank-and-file committee.

A rank-and-file committee would empower workers to defend and expand their strike against union busting tactics by the company and backstabbing by the union officials by reaching out to other sections of workers at Brulin and elsewhere for solidarity. The democratically controlled rank-and-file committee would draw up a list of demands including full wage increases, improved working conditions, job security, and respect in the workplace.

As shown by the “No Kings” protests on October 18, there is mass opposition growing to the Trump administration and there are now unprecedented conditions for workers to link up their struggles in a common fight against the entire capitalist system and

the threat of dictatorship.

The strike by workers at Brulin Holding Company is part of this fight and shows the urgent need for workers to build new organizations of struggle that can genuinely mobilize and defend their interests under conditions of growing attacks by the capitalist oligarchy that is preparing a fascist dictatorship to increase profits and destroy the basic rights of the working class.



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