

“The people doing the work should be making the money”: On Toledo, Ohio picket line Libbey Glass workers discuss 4-month strike

Jerry White
11 December 2025

To join the fight for rank-and-file committees, fill out the form at the end of the article.

The strike by more than 650 Libbey Glass workers in Toledo, Ohio, is approaching its fourth month with rank-and-file workers resisting efforts by the company and the United Steelworkers (USW) to impose a contract that would destroy long-standing rights and conditions.

On the picket line earlier this week, workers spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about their strike, the broader political issues confronting the working class, and the strategy needed to break the isolation of each separate struggle and unify them in a common fight against the corporate-government war on the working class.

This is the first contract since Libbey declared bankruptcy in 2020 and the USW and International Association of Machinists agreed to \$32 million in concessions, including cuts to wages, pensions and retiree health benefits. Now management, backed by private equity investors, is demanding even more: the elimination of seniority, the ability to send workers home to avoid paying overtime, a sweeping expansion of “management’s discretion” language and the outsourcing of critical skilled trades work.

On November 19, Libbey workers overwhelmingly defeated an attempt by the USW International to ram through management’s demands. The USW bureaucracy, however, is continuing to isolate the strike while it searches for a mechanism to force a revote.

Workers traced the company’s aggressive posture to its ownership structure. A longtime worker described the private equity buyout during bankruptcy: “Basically these were some kind of millionaire-billionaire investors. Five of them came in when Libbey went into bankruptcy. We took a 15 percent pay cut, got them out of bankruptcy two years early, and then they turn around and give us a

contract that does away with seniority, does away with any worker rights and with no overtime protections. They want to send you home if they don’t want you there and force somebody else in who hasn’t hit 40 hours. They’re trying to do away with overtime pay altogether.”

Skilled trades workers reported that contractors and subcontractors—who cost the company more per hour but do not require healthcare or retirement benefits—are being used to push out full-time legacy employees. “They’re willing to pay double or triple my wage for a contractor because then they don’t have to put them on the books,” a skilled trades worker said. “I end up following them around and fixing what they can’t. The knowledge that keeps the place running—20+ years—they’re throwing that away.” He warned that Libbey has not hired in his classification in years and is deliberately erasing the workforce needed to operate the plant safely. “Once they get you out the door, they can always find a contractor cheaper.”

Workers explained that management wants the strike ended and production resumed to fulfill holiday orders. A veteran machine operator said, “They were hoping to get us back by the 15th, but this is not something you can flip a switch and suddenly everything’s coming back on. Even if they backed off on their demands—and they haven’t—most of the electricians have found other jobs. A lot of machine repair people that really keep the place going have already moved on. You’re working with 2,000-degree glass. These machines will chop your hand off. If you don’t know what you’re doing, you shouldn’t be anywhere around it.”

WSWS reporters said Libbey and other corporations were taking their lead from the Trump administration’s war against the social and democratic rights workers have won over more than a century of struggle. The

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), they said, was fighting to mobilize the working class against the corporate and financial oligarchy and both political parties that defend it.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m with you there,” one of the veteran workers said. “The people who are doing the work should be making the money. It started in the 70s and 80s. Productivity continues to go up, and guess what happened to wages? They stagnated or declined.”

Asked what he thought about Trump’s efforts to divert social anger by scapegoating immigrant workers, he said, “Yeah, Trump keeps pointing the finger, trying to take your eye off the ball kind of a thing. If I cause enough confusion, then they won’t be worried about what’s actually going on, right? The name of the game is to have workers looking at each other suspiciously, like your neighbor or these people in these houses around here, saying they deserve to live like that because they’re low-lives. No, it’s because these jobs don’t pay anymore. My neighborhood was decent working class with a lot of people in the auto industry until they let the bankers screw over the whole housing market. Nobody went to jail over that. Instead, the banks got bailed out, and they got to keep the houses too and then sell them.”

The support for the unity of the working class cuts across the nationalist poison promoted by the USW, the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO, which long ago integrated themselves into the boardrooms of the corporations and supported wage-cutting in the name of competitiveness. As the worker noted, “When I did social work, we got cost of living every year. When I started working here in a union shop, we were getting 1 percent.”

Workers were acutely aware of the role of the USW apparatus in facilitating the company’s restructuring. One recalled the last time the USW International tried to impose concessions: “They did that last time. We didn’t take it. We held out for a better contract.” He agreed with the IWA-RFC’s call for power to be transferred from the union apparatus to the workers on the shop floor. “Yes, we should take it out of the hands of those people making hundreds of thousands of dollars and doing nothing for us.”

A central issue that the WSWS reporters discussed with workers was the need to break the strike’s isolation. Stellantis workers at Jeep were being forced to work 10-12 hours days, six and seven days a week, with the blessing of the UAW, and this has led to a sharp rise in injuries. In the Toledo public schools, more than 100

teachers are being laid off because of large deficits being worsened by Trump’s cuts to school funding. Postal workers and autoworkers were being killed due to speedup and safety violations. The conditions are ripe to unite Libbey workers with broader sections of the working class, just like during the 1934 Toledo Auto-Lite strike. “That’s what they need to do,” one worker said. “The whole country, basically.”

Workers also engaged in a serious discussion about the potential of Socialism AI, a new initiative launched by the WSWS aimed at giving workers the ability to obtain accurate information, translate communications with workers abroad, study the history of struggle, and plan collective action. Socialism AI could help Libbey workers communicate with their counterparts in Mexico and Portugal, overcome language barriers, and plan coordinated action based on shared conditions rather than competition for the lowest wage.

“It’d probably be a good tool to do what you’re trying to do—bring people together,” one worker said. Another raised a critical point: “It’s a matter of who controls it. If the people running the country control it, they’ll use it for war and to throw people out of their jobs. But if workers controlled it, it’d be totally different.”

The same thing is true of all technologies, the WSWS reporters said. In the hands of the working class, AI, robotics and other forms of automation could be used to make work safer and drastically shorten the workday, while increasing living standards and giving workers more time for their families and cultural pursuits.

“They are never going to pay us more for a shorter workweek,” the worker said, pausing for a second, “unless there is a revolution.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact