

Libbey Glass workers resist sabotage by IAM, USW officials as Toledo strike nears 5 months

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After nearly five months on strike, more than 500 Libbey Glass workers in Toledo, Ohio continue to hold the picket line against an employer determined to shred seniority, destroy overtime protections and gut the skilled trades that keep the plant running safely.

Libbey's owners and their financiers seek to eliminate seniority, expand blanket "management's discretion," impose mandatory 12-hour shifts and outsource critical trades to contractors who have no healthcare or pension obligations.

The courage and solidarity of the strikers have been tested every step of the way not only by management's threats but by the open sabotage of the trade union bureaucracy of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and the United Steelworkers (USW).

The strike started on August 23 when the workers, members of IAM Local 1297 and USW Locals 59, 700 and 65, overwhelmingly rejected the "last, best and final" offer. In the months since, IAM and USW officials have kept workers on starvation level strike benefits. At the same time, they have isolated the strike with the assistance of the Greater Northwest Ohio AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers, which have thousands of members in the Toledo area.

In mid-December, IAM Local 1297 pushed through a separate contract, ending its participation in the walkout and sending members back into the plant. The result has been the rupture of the strike's unity and the reintroduction of replacement labor across the line.

The situation has grown worse. Rank-and-file workers report that USW Local 65—the mold makers—held a snap vote on December 30 and workers ratified the company's offer under dubious circumstances.

A Libbey worker who remains on strike told the WSWS, "Questions have been raised on the legitimacy

of the vote. Many of their member were out of town or unavailable for the holidays. Some votes were cast over the phone which is most certainly not in any of the bylaws. The International denies having anything to do with the quick turn negotiations and vote done without the solidarity of the other two striking steelworker locals."

He continued, "The largest problem with them signing a contract is the 'no sympathy strike clause' which the International should have never allowed if they wanted actual solidarity with their sister unions. Word today as well is the president of the mold makers union has been offered employment in the International Steelworkers office effective almost immediately. Locals 700 and 59 remain out and steadfast to get a fair and equitable offer despite forces from all sides trying to squash our efforts."

This "no sympathy strike" language is the tool of strikebreaking. It transforms what should be mutual protection into an instrument for dividing workers. IAM and Local 65 officials have pressured their members to cross the picket lines of their fellow workers.

This follows the attempt by the USW International to ram through management's "last, best and final" offer in November. USW District 1 Donnie Blatt and other USW national officials called 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. In an effort to split the membership and suppress opposition, the International called separate informational meetings and votes, hoping to force through a ratification.

In a courageous act, rank-and-file workers from Local 65 attending the first meeting unanimously rejected the deal. Before the vote, the WSWS issued a statement

calling on Libbey workers to vote no, form a democratically elected strike committee and take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the USW bureaucracy.

The repeated backstabbing by USW and IAM officials confirms an iron rule: the trade union bureaucracy acts as agents of corporate management and the state. The USW and IAM bureaucracies control vast resources, live on large salaries and use members' dues to underwrite structures that are hostile to the interests of the rank and file.

It is clear that Libbey management and its private equity investors have been emboldened by the class war policies of the Trump administration and its wars of plunder abroad and state violence at home.

Added to this are the Trump administration's tariffs, encouragement of "reshoring" that is a pretext for increased speedup and layoffs, and embrace of corporate restructuring and the weaponization of technologies like AI to eliminate jobs.

The IAM, USW, the United Auto Workers and the Teamsters support Trump's economic nationalism and actively collaborate with a ruling class determined to make working people pay for the crisis of capitalism.

The only way forward is the transfer of power from the bureaucracy to the workers themselves. Libbey workers must form a Libbey Rank-and-File Strike Committee now. Such a committee must do the following:

- Demand full disclosure of any proposed contract, side letters and bargaining minutes and insist on a ratification vote conducted under worker control, with adequate time to review and debate. Snap, blackmail votes by international officials must be rejected.

- Take control of strike communications, publish all income and expenditures and ensure strike benefits sufficient to sustain rank-and-file perseverance. Union assets must be made available for strike defense, not hoarded by a privileged apparatus.

- Organize independent mass meetings, picketing and enforcement of the picket line; determine the terms of any return to work and refuse to allow bureaucrats to call off the strike unilaterally.

- Coordinate active solidarity—flying pickets, demonstrations and mass information drives—with workers at the Toledo Jeep assembly, Dana Driveline, Mercy and ProMedica hospitals, Cleveland Cliffs and

local oil refineries to break the isolation the bureaucracy has imposed.

- Reach out internationally via the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to mobilize support from glass workers and allied trades in Mexico, Portugal and elsewhere.

A specific appeal must be made to the thousands of Jeep workers at the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex whose class interests are identical to those on the Libbey picket line. The UAW bureaucracy has a record of making deals that lock in speedup, concessions and deadly conditions, like those that led to the deaths of Toledo Jeep worker Antonio Gaston and Dundee Engine Complex worker Ronald Adams Sr.

Libbey and Jeep workers should convene joint meetings, organize cross-plant demonstrations and prepare coordinated stoppages where necessary. A united working class in Toledo will strike a blow against the wholesale rollback of conditions across the region.

Rank-and-file committees are a necessary instrument to defend workers against industrial slavery and destitution. The history of the class struggle, including the 1934 Auto-Lite strike in Toledo to other major confrontations, shows that mass, democratically controlled action and a broad movement uniting workers across industries attacks by management and the government. That lesson must be revived and adapted for today's international economy.

If workers seize control, build rank-and-file committees and coordinate solidarity across plants and borders, this strike can become the beginning of a much broader fight to defend jobs, pensions, healthcare and democratic rights. If bureaucrats continue to fragment and betray, Libbey will be another precedent to justify further assaults across industry.

For victory, workers must act independently, democratically and in solidarity with their co-workers across industries, the region and national borders.

To get information on building a rank-and-file committee, fill out the form below.



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