

UAW bureaucracy announces deal in bid to end American Axle strike

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On Wednesday evening, the UAW bureaucracy announced a tentative agreement in the 10-day strike by 1,000 American Axle workers in Three Rivers, Michigan. In a video streamed press conference, standing in front of members of the Local 2093 bargaining committee, UAW President Shawn Fain presented the agreement as a historic breakthrough with workers, “winning back a big chunk of what was taken from them” in 2008 when their wages were cut from \$29 to \$14.50.

While Fain claimed that “workers will make their own decision about this deal,” the UAW apparatus is giving the strikers—who remain on the picket line—Friday to review “highlights” about the contract, Saturday to attend Q&A sessions with the union leadership and Sunday to vote on the four-year contract.

A review of the available details shows the tentative agreement is another sellout. The UAW said it will raise the wages of American Axle workers, who currently make \$22 an hour, to “\$30 by 2030.” American Axle workers made \$29 an hour in 2008—the equivalent of \$45 per hour today and, with inflation continuing at its present rate, would be making \$50 per hour by 2030. However, in 2008 the UAW betrayed an 87-day strike by 3,600 workers at the company in Michigan and New York, and agreed to 50 percent wage cuts to supposedly save jobs. The company promptly laid off half the workforce and shuttered plants in Detroit and the Buffalo, New York area, leaving Three Rivers as its major remaining plant.

The current agreement completely fails to make up for the lost income that was essentially stolen from workers over the past 18 years, which amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars each.

“There’s no respect. They don’t care,” a striking

worker who spoke with the WSWS said of the UAW apparatus. “They’re getting something more out of this. \$30 by 2030? They’re not talking to us.”

Another worker told the WSWS, “I saw the average for a new car is \$50,000 and used it’s \$32,000. How can we afford to buy the cars we make axles for? Some of us are already in massive debt with house and car payments, with working our lives away.”

The UAW bureaucracy has done everything possible to prevent the strike from developing into a broader struggle of workers in the auto parts and auto assembly facilities. From the start, UAW officials intended to run the strike as stage-managed public relations operation that could be hailed as a “victory” when the UAW Constitutional Convention opens on June 15 in Detroit.

The bureaucracy is desperately seeking to contain a growing rebellion of auto parts workers, including at Nexteer Automotive, Dana Incorporated and Bridgewater Interiors. Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan have rejected three UAW-backed sellout contracts that will keep top wages at just \$27 an hour by 2030. Defying the workers’ 86 percent strike mandate, Fain has sent his lieutenants, including Region 1D Director Steve Dawes and International Servicing Rep Jason Tuck, to browbeat the militant workers and hopes the shutdown of the American Axle strike will convince them to surrender.

The Nexteer workers established a rank-and-file committee and issued a letter to American Axle workers calling on them to reject any sellout agreement negotiated by the UAW and to join with them in a common fight against the employers and the union bureaucracy.

At the same time, Dana workers have rejected a UAW-backed agreement by votes of 90 percent or more in Ft. Wayne, Indiana; Warren, Michigan;

Toledo, Ohio and Columbia, Missouri. Like every other section of the working class, this militancy is being fueled by skyrocketing living expenses due to Trump's criminal war against Iran.

On the picket line in Three Rivers, American Axle workers were aware that the UAW bureaucracy was keeping parts workers divided. "We need to stop being isolated and have a joint strike," one worker told the WSWs while another commented, "We should all be uniting, all of us deserve to at least keep up with the cost of living."

The union apparatus also paraded a series of Democratic Party politicians before the workers on the American Axle picket line and allowed the capitalist politicians to use the strike as a backdrop for their electoral campaigns. "We had plenty of politicians come by, [Democratic Party Michigan Governor] Whitmer, [Michigan Democratic Party candidate for US Senate] El Sayed and others for photo ops," one worker said.

Even before the strike was launched, the union had coordinated overtime production carefully with the company to make sure enough product was in inventory so that a potential walkout would not impact the assembly plants, especially General Motors Flint Assembly where American Axle provides axles for heavy-duty and light-duty pickup trucks.

One striking worker described the hours that American Axle workers have been working. "We are on seven days and need work life balance," he said, adding, "we're working three weeks on seven days at 10-12 hour days. That's the baseline. But there are some people that have been on seven weeks straight."

Workers on the picket lines also drew the connection between rising inflation and war, and also pointed out that American Axle (now Dauch Corp.) has several military contracts with the Pentagon. "I don't agree with wars! US needs to stop policing the world," one worker said, while another added, "I thought the war with Iran was supposed to be over but it keeps going. The contractors were coming in and we were forced to get the plant cleaned."

The effort to end the strike underscores once again that the UAW apparatus functions as a direct tool of corporate management and both big business parties. While parading Democrats on the picket line, Fain is in a de facto alliance with Trump, promoting the lie that

the fascist president's tariffs and the destruction of workers' jobs in Canada and Mexico will benefit American workers. But economic nationalism and the subordination of workers' needs to the profit interests of the US-based corporations were the chief culprits for the massive wage cuts imposed on parts workers in the 1990s and 2000s.

The only answer to the global assault on the jobs and living standards of workers is the international unity of the working class and the coordination of struggles across national borders. This means the building of rank-and-file committees, under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to break the grip of the union bureaucracy and unleash the enormous power of the working class.

American Axle workers should reject the tentative agreement and build a rank-and-file strike committee to continue their walkout. They should link up with their brothers and sisters at Nexteer, Dana, Bridgewater and other parts plants, and with workers at the Big Three automakers.

These committees must be accountable only to workers themselves. Their role is to share information, coordinate action, oppose rushed votes and prepare collective strike action across the supplier sector, rather than waiting for permission from the bureaucracy. The experience at American Axle and Nexteer demonstrates that no struggle can be won so long as it remains in the hands of officials whose interests are tied to management.



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