

Striking Bradford White workers seek to break the isolation imposed by the UAW bureaucracy

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In their third week on strike, 1,200 Bradford White workers continue to take a militant stand in the face of management's strikebreaking operation. Workers at the plant rejected two contracts by margins of 96 percent before launching their strike September 16 after decades of concession contracts.

Workers continue to press demands for wage increases, full healthcare coverage, including spousal coverage, stronger retirement benefits and safety improvements. Last week, workers reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that a third contract proposal by the company was presented to the union. The fact that United Auto Workers officials felt they could not bring it to the membership for a vote reflects the continued fighting spirit of workers, despite the isolation imposed by Bradford White management and the UAW bureaucracy.

Last week, two striking workers were hit on the line when a truck driver drove through the picket. A male picketer suffered bruises and a female striker was knocked to the ground. Bradford White management claimed the driver was employed by a third-party delivery company and has now been banned from the property.

Reports indicated that there has been more security surrounding the plant, including the Barry County Sheriff's Middleville unit, which has visited the picket multiple times.

Despite the active strikebreaking operations by Bradford White, workers have continued to man the picket line in force.

A delegation of Bradford White strikers attended an online campaign meeting for rank-and-file Mack Trucks autoworker Will Lehman, who is running for UAW president against incumbent Shawn Fain. The online meeting, titled, "The way forward after the vote: A rank-and-file strategy to fight job cuts, war and dictatorship," included participation from workers involved with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in the US, Canada and Mexico.

A young production worker at Bradford White exclaimed after the meeting, "It was pretty cool to hear from workers around the globe!" A higher seniority worker responded, "It's mind-blowing hearing all the same or similar things going on everywhere." He saw the commonality of his experiences with those of other workers in the meeting, including a striking National Steel Car worker from Canada and a worker at General Motors in Silao, Mexico.

Management, he said, wants us to "just keep giving everything up until there's nothing left to negotiate over and still take from what's left. ... meanwhile [Bradford White] is buying up multiple companies, adding robots to replace us bought with money off our backs and not having a supervisor with over 14 years in the shop because they all hit their paydays."

He said the UAW had blocked workers from striking against previous contracts. "The company can't keep anyone there with the top pay for production being \$21. Over my years of being here it's been concession after concession. Now the turnover is so bad that if you hire 50, you expect two to stay."

"There's no accountability on safety. They skirt the rules as often as they can—the company would rather pay fines for daily violations regarding silica dust than to actually fix the problem."

He also spoke to the waste and lack of planning by management, which he characterized as "chaos." He felt that seven years ago, Bradford White workers were in a strong position to strike against the company, but the UAW International tied their hands. Of the UAW, he said, "I don't feel like part of a union. I don't even know what my dues go to."

Since their initial public statements at the beginning of the strike, UAW Region 1-D Director Steve Dawes and UAW President Shawn Fain have remained silent. Outside a brief photo-op by Dawes and Fain, who feigned support for strikers while expressing hope that Bradford White would "come to their senses," the workers have been left isolated. Bradford White workers have been on the picket line receiving only \$550 a week while Dawes and Fain receive roughly \$4,419 and \$5,315 weekly respectively from their \$200,000+ annual salaries.

A striker raised the question of tariffs, noting, "I heard that these tariffs were really hurting Canada, but I also know they're hurting us here. I don't see how it can be both."

WSWS reporters explained that the UAW's answer to job cuts is the reactionary and bankrupt program of economic nationalism. Fain has supported Trump's tariffs, claiming they would "bring good jobs back to America," while joining with Democratic candidate for US Senate Abdul El-Sayed in Lansing last month to attack Trump from the right, based on rabid anti-Chinese demagoguery.

As Will Lehman repeatedly stressed at the meeting Sunday, workers had to reject the poison of nationalism. "Capitalists

themselves have no way out of the situation other than war, maneuvering to succeed in their own country.” Tariffs, he said, “will only drive workers into poverty and pit them against one another on an international basis. Union bureaucrats support this because it helps distract workers from what they actually need to do.”

A higher seniority worker spoke to the WWSWS about the strike, “I agree with your articles, what you’ve said nailed it. There was supposed to be a big shutdown of truckers [he said of the October 1 truck-driver shutdown] to stop the tariffs. It’s time we join them. Right now Bradford White is bringing in part-time people and there are more of us on the pickets. Now we found out what happened to the two people who got hurt inside.

“We’ve been talking about safety, one person with the tank explosion, had shrapnel in his arm and side and was taken in an ambulance. Another supervisor had two screws go right through his fingers. They would rather save money than spend money making things safe.

“We heard they have a lot of scrap with scabs, clerks, managers and supervisors on the line. When we were in there they wanted us to increase production. It’s impossible. They know what they’re doing, there’s no sympathy. On the last contract they had one person per job, now its multiple jobs per person for the same amount of money.”

Another worker spoke about the reports on the third contract proposal submitted by management. “It was not voted on since it was the same contract, less than 20 cents increase. The bargaining committee said that there was no movement on our spouses’ insurance. The mood of everyone on the line has been positive and they are sticking together.

“Last week we received our first [strike] check after one and a half weeks. It’s been stressful for a lot of people. The shops down the road, like H&L, are on layoff since they can’t unload stock until we come back for more overtime.”

Asked about Will Lehman’s call for connecting the struggle at Bradford White with other sections of workers more broadly, he said, “Especially those linked with Bradford who will stand with us in the community we have support, but it also needs to be beyond Michigan.”

One production worker read the Nexteer Rank-and-File Committee statement in which workers have still not received the actual text of their contract. “It’s really sneaky,” he said. “It’s confusing on why the UAW is like this. Are they corrupt? I don’t have much experience with the union but I know that it used be that there was communist scare tactics. I know on the picket line the idea of solidarity is understood. But working class solidarity with socialism needs to be understood and is difficult. There’s been propaganda against it.”

The WWSWS explained that the UAW bureaucracy was indeed corrupt, but not just because of bad individuals. The leadership is tied to the companies and the government. Their real job is to keep workers from fighting, not to lead the fight.

The corporations and the government spent decades scaring workers away from socialism because they know that when workers understand their own interests, they’re dangerous. ‘Communist scare tactics’ were never about protecting

workers—they were about keeping workers divided and powerless.

In fact the great battles that gave birth to the mass industrial unions like the Minneapolis general strike and the Flint sit-down strike were led by revolutionary-minded militants inspired by the ideas of socialism and communism.

At the start of the strike, Will Lehman wrote to Bradford White workers, “A rank-and-file committee must reach out to workers at Bradford White’s other plants and to parts workers and workers at the Big Three to transform an isolated strike into a unified offensive.” Bradford White workers are part of a growing opposition in the working class, voting by margins of over 90 percent against sellout agreements and for strike action. Workers have demonstrated their determination, but as the Nexteer Rank-and-File Committee stated, “We are not extras in a movie directed by management and Solidarity House. We build the parts that keep the Big Three lines running. That is real power, and we intend to use it. The rank and file—not the bureaucracy, management or shareholders—should decide what happens on the floor.”

Bradford White workers must immediately establish a rank-and-file committee of their own, elected by and accountable to the workers, to:

- Publish the workers’ own demands, which should include rank-and-file control over safety, the abolition of the tier system and an immediate pay increase to \$35 an hour.
- Elect a rank-and-file bargaining committee to oversee contract negotiations.
- Demand full strike pay from day one, paid out of the nearly \$1 billion strike fund that belongs to the members.
- No ratification vote unless the full contract text is released and workers are given adequate time to read and debate it.

The committee must reach out to workers at Bradford White’s other plants—in Rochester, New Hampshire, Niles, Michigan and elsewhere—to prevent scab production, and to workers at Nexteer, Dana, Bridgewater and the Big Three, to transform an isolated strike into a united offensive of the working class.



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