

Workers must mobilize to defeat sellout

UAW announces sellout deal, calls Friday contract ratification vote at Bradford White

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Striking Bradford White workers in Middleville, Michigan, report that the United Auto Workers bureaucracy presented a concessionary tentative agreement with management to members at a union meeting held Sunday afternoon, with a vote scheduled for Friday.

At the Sunday union meeting, which one worker described as “contentious,” workers voiced opposition to a proposed tentative agreement presented by UAW officials that permitted the open-ended use of temporary workers by management. The use of temp workers is a tool by management to cut costs and divide workers by creating a subclass of workers possessing few if any rights and lower pay and benefits. As a means of selling the deal, management agreed to provide a larger upfront pay increase to all employees, raising wages by \$2 an hour immediately, rather than its earlier offer of \$1 an hour.

With a current starting wage of as low as \$18.25 an hour and some positions topping out at under \$21 an hour, a \$2 hourly raise is a slap in the face that will leave workers unable to afford basic necessities amid rampaging inflation.

This is the same playbook used by the UAW bureaucracy at American Axle, Nexteer and Dakkota Industries in Chicago, where snap votes were organized while union officials withheld the full contract text and used heavy-handed pressure tactics to ram through a sellout.

According to “highlights” viewed by the WSWs, the contract is for six years, with a wage re-opener after four years. It includes a one-time ratification bonus of \$2,000 for workers with more than one year seniority and \$1,000 for those with less than one year.

Current workers at the lowest pay grade will get an immediate \$1.96 pay increase with an additional 50 cents each year for the next five years, topping out at \$25.25 with other pay grades receiving similar increases. Skilled workers will get an immediate hourly pay raise of over \$6 with 70-75 cents annual raises thereafter.

To offset the cost of the additional first-year pay raise, the company reduced its 401(k) employer match.

That the UAW would accept such a deal underscores the fact that, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned, the union apparatus is working on the side of management. It poses the urgent need for workers to take up the fight into their own hands by building a rank-and-file committee to campaign for the defeat of the deal and to broaden the strike by reaching out to wider sections of the working class.

A worker who attended the union meeting told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “People were concerned with the UAW backing us if we vote ‘no’ on this one. The spokesperson [UAW Local 1002

Bargaining Chairman] Randy Tobias said, ‘they will back us all the way.’”

He added, “Another person brought up, ‘why are we participating in this give-and-take style of negotiating when our leverage comes from us being on strike?’”

A veteran worker contacted by the WSWs called the deal the “same garbage.” He said the bargaining committee “is not up on what it’s all about; they think every contract is a good deal. I thought we had an arbitrator here to help them understand, but I guess not, because this would have never been brought to us, I believe.”

The reported agreement follows the intervention of a mediator in the contract talks. As the WSWs warned, the mediator’s intervention is a mechanism by which the bureaucracy manufactures a “compromise” to sell to the membership—giving the sellout a veneer of “impartiality.”

Speaking to the WSWs earlier about the talks with the mediator and the information blackout imposed by the UAW and management, one worker said, “They want to shut this down, because they’re making a lot of scrap with supervisors working in the plant.” His coworker added, “They’re not getting the production numbers we put in there.”

The reality is that the UAW has left Bradford White workers to fight on their own. UAW President Shawn Fain has not issued even a perfunctory statement in support of the strike. Neither Fain nor UAW Region 1-D Director Steve Dawes has lifted a finger to mobilize wider support for the strike, even as management has stepped up its strikebreaking operation.

The inaction of the UAW bureaucracy stands in contrast with the determination of management to break the strike. The company has mobilized out-of-state strikebreakers, who are being accommodated in local motels. Meanwhile, the Barry County Sheriff’s Office’s Middleville unit is patrolling the picket line, protecting the strikebreakers and intimidating striking workers.

A male picketer suffered bruises, and a female striker was knocked to the ground. Bradford White management claimed the driver worked for a third-party delivery company and has since been banned from the property.

Speaking about the use of strikebreakers, one worker said, “There’s no security with the trucks coming through the picket line. They only reported when those two people got hit. I almost was hit several times,” a seniority worker said.

Another reported, “We are not happy. A few even left for better jobs. Nobody understands why the company would pay to put all these people up in motels and pay temp agencies more than they are willing

to pay us.”

The strike by 1,200 Bradford White workers is now in its fifth week. The workers are demanding wage increases that outpace inflation, full healthcare coverage, including spousal coverage, stronger retirement benefits and improved workplace safety.

Last week WSWs reporters distributed articles to strikers analyzing the debacle of the UAW election, in which only 9 percent of eligible members cast ballots. The rank-and-file boycott represented a massive repudiation of the UAW apparatus and undermines any claim that Fain received a popular mandate by winning 68 percent of the vote. In fact, workers are disgusted with all factions of the UAW apparatus, which has imposed one sellout contract after another.

“I saw the election material and ballot and threw it in the trash. It is like the midterm elections. I won’t vote for [Republican candidate for US Senate] Rogers or [Democrat] Sayed. You’re forced to vote for the lesser evil. It goes back to the union in here. We don’t know anything about this mediator, and we are supposed to have a meeting on Sunday about the contract.”

The same worker, who is in his 50s, pointed to the attacks on retirement and healthcare that run through every contract negotiated by the bureaucracy.

If you look at how they set up retirement, some of us would have free retiree healthcare. Most of us miss the cutoff, just like with the pensions. That’s the blueprint for everyone, not just Bradford White. Like GM, they don’t have retiree healthcare either. They know that people need money, so they show \$26 an hour. The pay sounds great, except if you have a family.

I remember the last contract. The president of the local told us the contract was crap one week, and the next week he said to vote for it. Now he has a brand-new truck. At that time, with COVID, we were “critical” for production of water heaters.

Workers described the hardship of trying to live on the paltry strike pay issued by the UAW, which sits atop a nearly \$1 billion strike fund.

Some people have 15-plus years in the plant with families. It’s exhausting for them. They rely on a paycheck with some overtime included, but now they’re only getting \$550 in strike pay from the union. It’s stressing me out, being on strike for almost one month.

Growing up, we were told about the importance of Bradford White in this area. In 2010, they froze hiring for six years. Now, 40 to 50 people are brought in, and only three to six last. It is one of the biggest water heater suppliers in the world. People need water heaters for any building.

Workers say safety concerns are also an issue in the strike.

“This is a relatively safe job, but like any blue-collar job, we deal with high heat and metal. We need healthcare.

“Some of the machines are from our grandparents’ time, and we are required to wear PPE. There is always a chance of getting hurt here. We had a tank fall on someone in the plant. He had a blood clot and

died in his sleep. We need health care for retirees.

“I heard of people getting heat stroke. It can happen any time, whether you’re walking, sitting or standing. When it is 80 degrees outside, it is 100 degrees inside when you have boots, pants and welding equipment on. During the California wildfires, we were told it was equivalent to smoking seven packs of cigarettes. Breathing made me nauseous.”

Build rank-and-file committees to fight the sellout

Bradford White workers must immediately establish a rank-and-file committee, elected by and accountable to the workers, with all negotiations livestreamed and overseen by the rank and file:

- **Vote NO on this contract, and refuse any ratification vote unless the full contract text is released and workers are given adequate time to read and debate it.**

- **Publish the workers’ own demands, including rank-and-file control over safety, the abolition of the tier system, and an immediate pay increase to \$35 an hour.**

- **Demand \$1,000 weekly strike pay, backdated from day one, paid out of the nearly \$1 billion strike fund that belongs to the members.**

- **Form a rank-and-file committee, elected by and accountable to the workers, to oversee contract negotiations and reach out to workers at Bradford White’s other plants and the Big Three.**

Bradford White workers have already demonstrated the fighting spirit by rejecting two previous contract offers and manning the picket lines for over a month in the face of strikebreaking by management. The obstacle to victory is not the workers’ determination; it is the UAW apparatus that has spent decades selling them out. The answer is not to accept another concession but to build the independent, rank-and-file organization that can actually win—and to connect this fight to the broader struggle of the working class against management and the Democratic and Republican politicians that stand behind them.



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