

After election debacle, the UAW apparatus moves to break the Bradford White strike

Jerry White
28 October 2026

This weekend, 1,200 Bradford White workers in Middleville, Michigan, in the seventh week of their strike, are being told by the United Auto Workers (UAW) to vote on what management calls its “last, best and final” offer. The deal is essentially the same one that the water heater manufacturing workers rejected by 62 percent a week ago, after defeating two earlier agreements by 96 percent.

That is, the UAW is bringing essentially the same contract back a fourth time, now with the company’s strikebreaking threat behind it.

The Bradford White strike and the threatened closure of the Dakkota parts plant in Detroit are the first major tests of the apparatus since the union election three weeks ago. In that election, nine out of 10 UAW members refused to take part in the vote. Only 98,666 ballots were counted, a turnout of 8.9 percent, the lowest for any major union election in US history.

Shawn Fain was “reelected” with the votes of about 6 percent of the membership; subtract the ballots of the union’s own officials and staff, and the rank-and-file figure is closer to 3 percent. The media, along with Fain’s backers in the Democratic Socialists of America and Labor Notes, hailed this as a “renewed mandate.” The workers’ verdict was delivered in the boycott, which reflected the alienation and hostility of the workers to the entire apparatus.

The deal the Bradford White workers rejected on October 23, backed by the UAW International and the Local 1002 leadership, limited raises to less than \$2 an hour for most workers, with wages topping out at \$25.25 after five years and starting pay as low as \$18.25. The first-year raise is paid for by cutting the 401(k) match from 4.5 to 3 percent, and the deal expands the use of temporary workers. Top production pay is now about \$21 an hour, and turnover is so high

that, as one worker put it, “if you hire 50, you expect two to stay.”

Union officials acknowledge the new deal is essentially unchanged. The only difference is a small bump in the ratification bonus, designed to exploit the fact that workers are living on \$550 a week in strike benefits, drawn from a strike fund of nearly \$1 billion. Region 1-D Director Scott Zuckschwerdt and Fain, paid roughly \$4,419 and \$5,315 a week, have said nothing about the strike for weeks apart from brief social media posts. Meanwhile, the UAW is channeling its resources into campaigning for Democrats in the midterm elections, even as Fain backs Trump’s tariffs and trade war measures.

Implicit in “last, best and final” is the threat to impose the terms and replace the strikers with scabs. The company has already sent part-timers, managers and supervisors through the picket lines, protected by the Barry County Sheriff Dar Leaf, a vicious Trump backer and member of the fascist “constitutional sheriffs” association.

Workers have told the WSWs that Local 1002 officials have warned that continuing the strike without the union’s backing would make it a “wildcat” that left workers subject to termination.

This is the playbook Fain and Co. have used countless times, including during the 2023 Mack Trucks strike, when the UAW brought back a “last, best and final offer” virtually identical to what workers had rejected by 73 percent. Mack worker Will Lehman, who ran against Fain in 2022 and 2026, led the fight against that sellout.

In Detroit, Dakkota Integrated Systems has announced the closure of its plant and the elimination of 397 jobs, without a word of opposition from the UAW, whose Solidarity House headquarters is less

than three miles away.

The UAW bureaucracy has long enforced poverty wages on parts workers to drive down costs for the Detroit Three, which produced this year's rejection votes of 90 percent or higher at Nexteer, Dana, Bridgewater and other suppliers. At both Bradford White and Dakkota, the apparatus is functioning as a labor police force and arm of corporate management.

The boycott of the UAW elections was not apathy but a sign of growing anger and desire to fight. At Local 155, which includes the Dakkota workers, only 273 votes were cast out of more than 5,600 members. At Local 1002, 65 of the 1,260 Bradford White workers voted. Given the opportunity to vote down a sellout or authorize strike action, however, workers turn out. Across the border, thousands of Stellantis workers packed an auditorium in Windsor, Canada earlier this month and voted by 97 percent to strike to defend their jobs.

The one campaign that spoke to this anger was that of Will Lehman, who ran for UAW president as a socialist. Lehman called for the abolition of the bureaucracy and the transfer of power to rank-and-file committees in the plants; for the unity of autoworkers across the US, Canada and Mexico against the nationalism promoted by the UAW and the Democrats; and for linking the struggle in the plants to a political fight against the capitalist system.

The WSWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on workers at Bradford White to reject the "last, best and final" offer and take the strike out of the hands of the apparatus that has kept it isolated for nearly seven weeks. We encourage workers to elect a rank-and-file strike committee made up of and accountable to plant workers.

Such a committee would publish the workers' own demands: a \$35 hourly wage and the abolition of tiers and temporary labor; full healthcare and a real pension; COLA linked to inflation; rank-and-file control over safety; and \$1,000 a week in strike pay, backdated to September 16, from the fund the workers themselves built. It would break the isolation by appealing directly to workers at the Niles, Michigan and Rochester, New Hampshire plants, to parts workers at Nexteer, Dana, Dakkota and Bridgewater, and to the Big Three plants in the US, Mexico and Canada to refuse scab-produced

goods and prepare joint action.

The same applies at Dakkota, where a rank-and-file committee should fight to keep the plant open, in unity with the Mack Assembly workers whose production depends on it and all Detroit Three autoworkers to defeat any scheme to reopen it under a new name with a cheaper workforce.

These issues face every autoworker and the entire working class. The working class has the power to stop the attack at Bradford White, at Dakkota and everywhere else; the Bradford White strikers have shown it three times over.

The task is to give that opposition organized expression and direction: rank-and-file committees in every plant, independent of the UAW and coordinated through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, uniting workers across plants, companies and borders, against corporations restructuring the industry on a world scale; and a political perspective that rejects subordination to the corporations, to the two parties of big business and to the nationalism that divides workers.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact