



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

UAW workers at Daimler Truck win big wage gains: Organize the South!

written by Stephen Millies
May 1, 2024



Photo: UAW

Blinking at the last minute on April 26, Daimler Truck agreed to union demands for big pay raises. The 7,300 United Auto Workers members won an immediate 10% wage increase.

Pay will go up by at least 25% over the proposed four-year contract. UAW President

Sean Fain announced that employees will for the first time receive cost of living increases.

The lowest-paid UAW members making school buses at Daimler's Thomas Built Bus won increases of over \$8 an hour. Their wages will match the pay of the workers in the truck plants.

Equal pay for equal work was won. [The hated pay tiers](#) — where two workers doing the same job get different pay because of when they were hired — will be abolished.

Daimler — headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany — is the world's biggest commercial vehicle manufacturer. It made \$4.3 billion in profits last year from exploiting 100,000 workers in the United States, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Türkiye and other countries.

Corporate profits are stolen wages. Daimler's wage theft amounted to an average of \$43,000 in profit taken from every one of its employees.

The huge corporation saw how UAW's successful strikes last year against General Motors, Ford and Stellantis (Chrysler and Jeep) brought the Big Three automakers to their knees. The week before, workers at Volkswagen's Chattanooga, Tennessee, plant voted three to one to join the UAW.

What made the Daimler and Volkswagen victories all the more important is that they happened in the U.S. South.

[Daimler has truck factories](#) in Cleveland, Gastonia and Mount Holly, North Carolina, and Gaffney, South Carolina. The Thomas Built Buses plant is in Mount Holly. (There's also a Daimler Freightliner truck plant in Portland, Oregon.)

Using the Klan to bust unions

The UAW breakthroughs in the Carolinas and Tennessee are historic because unions have been overwhelmingly kept out of southern states.

Just one out of 37 workers in North Carolina have union protection. That's 2.7% of the workforce.

Next door [in South Carolina](#), only 2.6% of workers belong to unions.

This union busting is a legacy of slavery and the bloody overthrow of the Reconstruction governments in the South following the U.S. Civil War. The Ku Klux Klan was used to break union drives like at the old Bibb textile mills in Macon, Georgia, in the 1940s.

Wall Street bankers were the puppet masters of these lynch regimes which they viewed as reservoirs of cheap labor. Behind the fascist Alabama Gov. George Wallace was U.S. Steel, whose mills dominated the state's economy in the 1960s.

At least U.S. Steel hired Black workers, although usually in the worst jobs. Ford and General Motors refused to employ Black workers on their Atlanta area assembly lines until the early 1960s. They did so only after Black workers in Detroit threatened walkouts.

The biggest southern industry was textiles, centered in the Carolinas. Yankee textile outfits fled south to escape union drives in the North. By 1960, 89% of U.S. textile production was in the South.

Wages in southern mills were up to 40% below the northern average. Key to keeping this industry non-union was keeping out Black workers.

No other manufacturing industry in the United States was so segregated for so long. In the southeastern textile belt, millions of Black workers lived near mills where they couldn't get a job.

Hiring Black workers in southern textile mills is one of the great triumphs of the civil rights movement. However, hundreds of these plants, including the Bibb Mills, have since shut down.

When Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeill and David Richmond began their sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, on Feb. 1, 1960, just 3.3% of textile workers were Black.

Eighteen years later, in 1978, African Americans "held a quarter of all production jobs in the Southern textile industry." ("Hiring the Black Worker, The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980," by Timothy J. Minchin)

Avenging Ella May Wiggins

Some whites did break with Jim Crow. The most notable example was the Gastonia, North Carolina strike — led by the Communist Party — in 1929. Today Gastonia is home to one of the UAW-organized Daimler truck plants.

Despite a fantastically intense campaign of race-baiting, hundreds of white workers remained loyal to the National Textile Workers Union. The NTW called for equality between Black and white workers.

The strike was drowned in blood. Among its martyrs was 29-year-old union leader Ella May Wiggins. She was shot to death in broad daylight on Sept. 14, 1929.

Typical of the poverty suffered by white textile workers was that four of Wiggins' children died of whooping cough. ("The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker 1920-1933," by Irving Bernstein)

Textile workers were seething. They exploded in 1934. One hundred seventy thousand workers went on strike in the South.

Bosses and their state governments mobilized 23,000 sheriff deputies, National Guard soldiers and private gunmen to break the strike.

After receiving \$20,000 from mill owners, Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge declared martial law. A concentration camp for arrested strikers was set up at Fort McPherson near Atlanta.

Thirteen strikers were killed in the South. Another two died in the North. Seven workers were murdered at the Chiquola Mill in Honea Path, South Carolina, alone. ("Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South," by Janet Irons)

President Franklin Roosevelt and Labor Secretary Frances Perkins did nothing about these bloody massacres. Don't count on Joe Biden to help union organizing drives either. Genocide Joe is busy helping to kill children in Gaza.

The capitalist deep state also allowed the Klan and Nazis to murder five Communist Workers Party members in Greensboro, North Carolina, on Nov. 3, 1979.

Cesar Cauce, Mile Nathan, Bill Sampson, Sandi Smith and Jim Waller were murdered in front of TV cameras. The leader of these fascist killers, Edward Dawson, was on the payroll of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of the United States Treasury Department.

None of the assassins spent a day in jail. Like the Honea Path atrocity in 1934, the Greensboro Massacre was approved by the wealthy and powerful.

The UAW victories at Daimler and Volkswagen are helping to avenge Ella May Wiggins and the Greensboro martyrs. Organize the South!

