

# UAW faces growing opposition from Indiana Lear workers following contract rejection

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Following the unexpected landslide rejection of a United Auto Workers (UAW)-backed contract at two of Lear Corporation's Indiana plants Sunday, the UAW has been scrambling to contain workers' opposition.

Workers at plants in Hammond and Portage, Indiana, voted "no" by nearly three to one (74 percent) on the UAW-backed tentative agreement. The workers manufacture seats for the Ford Explorer, which is produced at the nearby Chicago Assembly Plant.

The courageous stand taken against the pro-corporate agenda of the company and the union has provoked widespread interest and support among other workers, with many sharing the *World Socialist Web Site* article "Indiana Lear auto parts workers overwhelmingly reject UAW-backed contract proposal" on Facebook. As of this writing, the contract rejection vote has been entirely ignored by the corporate press.

Workers at Lear should carry forward the momentum of the "no" vote and not wait for the UAW to string out the negotiations and beat back opposition. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* calls on workers to act immediately to elect rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the union, to formulate demands which take as their starting point workers' needs.

Such committees should take the conduct of the negotiations out of the hands of the UAW—which has proven itself to be a representative of management, not workers—and begin making preparations for strike action. At the same time, an urgent appeal must be made to the many other sections of workers facing a similar fight against poverty wages and miserable working conditions.

The overwhelming rejection of the UAW-backed deal at Lear is another sign of the growing wave of working class militancy in the US and internationally. Anger continues to simmer among tens of thousands of UPS

workers, who have seen the Teamsters union attempt to force through a brutal concessions contract, despite a 54 percent "no" vote. In the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, striking autoworkers seeking to oppose low wages at Yamaha Motors India and other companies have faced arrest and threats of termination.

Workers at Lear and other auto parts plants have suffered decades of sharp declines in wages and benefits, imposed with the willing assistance of the UAW. The average hourly wage for auto parts production and other non-supervisory workers declined 7 percent between 2006 and 2016, according the *Wall Street Journal*. In 2016, UAW officials acknowledged that they were in the midst of negotiations with Lear over the possibility of the company hiring on hundreds of workers at a lower wage scale in Detroit, in an effort by the union to increase its dues base.

In 2014, the UAW attempted to claim that it was "ending two-tier" at the Lear Hammond plant, knowing there was massive hostility to the tier system which it had initiated. In reality, however, the union had agreed to the creation of a new tier of sub-assembly workers, who would be moved to a plant in Portage and have their wages capped at an even lower level.

Lear workers told the WSWS in 2015 that the UAW's claims of ending the tiers were "far-fetched," that they had "screwed us over," and that there were new demands for speed-up following the enactment of the contract.

In the current situation, UAW Local 2335 has responded to the rejection of its contract by seeking both to placate workers' anger and to cover up its role in attempting to push through yet another sellout agreement.

On Monday, the local released a statement asserting that officials had sought to "survey [members]

individually,” and “due to time constraints” would hold a series of “ratification feedback” meetings. The local offered no explanation as to why they had falsely promoted the deal—which they attempted to ram through Sunday, refusing to distribute the agreement beforehand—as “helping support our families with a better wage.”

Sometime Monday or Tuesday, in a blatant act of censorship aimed at stamping out opposition, Local 2335 deleted a post from its Facebook page from Sunday, which had shown the total ballot count from the ratification vote. The post had attracted a number of comments from workers, who were either thrilled that the contract was voted down, or incredulous and angry that the union had even brought it to a vote.

Meanwhile, on the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*’s Facebook page, Sherry Franciski-Dauksza, the vice president of Local 2335 and a member of the bargaining committee which negotiated the agreement workers had just voted down, hysterically denounced the reporting of the *WSWS* as “lies,” writing, “THIS ARTICLE IS FILLED WITH LIES! THIS GROUP THAT MADE THIS ARTICLE IS A UNION BUSTING GROUP.....” When challenged, however, Franciski-Dauksza was unable to point to anything that was factually inaccurate in the report.

Jerry White, editor of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, responded, explaining [The] “UAW is not a ‘union’ in any sense from the standpoint of the interest of workers. It does not unite, it divides workers by tiers, between plants, etc. It has taken millions in bribes to sign pro-company deals. That’s why workers need rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, to fight.”

In a revealing reply, Franciski-Dauksza actually said she agreed with White’s characterization of the UAW, adding morosely, “I agree Jerry, but you have reps and people that r honest and really do try!! Sad it is the way it is...”

The UAW’s denunciation of the article as “lies”—which is at the same time an attempt to delegitimize workers’ genuine opposition to its pro-corporate agenda—is in line with its campaign, going back to the 2015 contract negotiations, to fraudulently characterize the *WSWS*’ efforts to expose the truth as “fake news.”

In sharp contrast with the UAW’s efforts at damage

control, workers at Lear described the deterioration of their living conditions over several contracts. “I work at this plant,” wrote Pam. “I have been there going on 19 years. Last contract us seniors over the 4 years [of the contract] only equaled out to be a 10 cent raise by the time we paid more insurance and losing the match on our 401k and them freezing our pension.”

“I think we deserve better than what they want to give us. Plus the back pay from when our contract ended, they want to add it in on our signing bonus. Really r u kidding me and let them give us a luxury tax on our wages. BOGUS.”

Workers at other companies who had undergone their own painful experiences at the hands of the UAW shared their statements of support and denounced the role of the union.

Jeff, a worker at the agricultural equipment company John Deere, commented, “Good for them the [UAW] did the same thing to Deere employees last contract, rushed them to a vote not knowing what was in the contract. UAW is in bed with management!!”

A worker with several years at the Ford Chicago Assembly told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that she had not previously realized how low starting wages were at the Lear plants. She stated her support for a common struggle of Ford, Lear, and other workers, adding, “I think we should join together, cause if the company can get away with it with them they’ll try it with all of us. Workers in every field need to be united.”

“The best predictor of the future is the UAW’s track record,” said a Fiat Chrysler worker in Kokomo, Indiana. “The overwhelming majority of members have zero confidence in the money-leaching UAW. It is as if the UAW International works for the companies. We cannot trust them to bargain on our behalf. The way the UAW treats workers exposes them not as an organization for workers, but an organization for big business!”



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