

UAW hides details of new tentative agreement from Indiana Lear workers

Marcus Day
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The WSWS urges workers interested in forming rank-and-file committees at their plants to contact us.

The United Auto Workers is again seeking to force through a sellout agreement at Lear Corporation's auto parts factories in Hammond and Portage, Indiana. The latest maneuvers come a little less than one month after workers defied the union and decisively rejected, by 74 percent, a UAW-backed contract proposal that would have maintained the hated multi-tier system. Workers are determined to conduct a struggle against poverty wages, starting as low as \$12.10 an hour at the Portage seating "sub-assembly" plant, and decades of declining living standards and working conditions.

On November 9, a UAW Local 2335 committee member sent an official notice to workers reporting that a new tentative agreement had been reached. Incredibly, the notice provided no information about the deal or when it would be released.

"Thank you for your patience throughout these negotiations," the announcement stated. "After several days and many late nights, the Union and Company have reached a Tentative Agreement late last night - November 8, 2018."

"Details (dates, times, locations) where the ratification meetings and voting will be held; will be available soon."

Aside from the notice quietly sent to Lear workers, the union and the company have given no public indication that a deal has been reached, seeking to keep news of it out of the press and away from the attention of workers at other plants.

There is every reason to suspect that the UAW is trying to hide that it is pushing essentially the same agreement that workers already overwhelmingly voted down, with nothing but cosmetic changes from the first one. During phony "feedback" meetings held after the initial contract was rejected, UAW Local 2335 President Jamie Luna, conducting himself like a representative of the company, told workers that the deal "is what it is." According to him, Lear, which has been raking in record profits in recent years, could not afford anything better.

To conduct a genuine struggle, everything depends on

workers taking the initiative. It is necessary to organize and elect rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the union and democratically controlled by workers themselves. These committees should draw up and issue demands which correspond to what workers actually need. They should begin preparations for a strike, reaching out to coordinate with workers at other auto plants and in other industries, such as UPS, Amazon, steel, and elsewhere.

In what has become standard operating procedure for the unions, UAW Local 2335 has kept workers in the dark throughout the negotiations. It forced workers to stay on the job following the expiration of the previous contract in August.

Workers were highly suspicious when the local announced a tentative agreement had been reached with the company on October 3, the same day the results of the strike authorization vote were announced. Some have questioned whether the union had already reached the deal before the vote took place. Local 2335 President Luna stonewalled demands to release the contract ahead of the ratification vote, instead declaring, "Everything is done at the ratification."

Workers suspected that the union was again seeking to impose a swindle, as it had in the 2014 contract. At the time, after calling a bogus 24-hour strike, Luna and the union had trumpeted claims that the two-tier system had been eliminated. Workers discovered days after the contract passed that the union had instead agreed to shift the second tier of "sub-assembly" workers to another plant in Portage, Indiana. They were to have their wages capped even lower than the second tier under the previous contract, at just \$15.25. Further, legacy "just-in-time" workers in Hammond received an insulting \$1.58 raise over the course of the four-year agreement, essentially a pay cut with inflation and health care cost increases taken into account.

In the current negotiations workers quickly realized after receiving the contract packet why the union had refused to release any information until the ratification vote. Workers were outraged to learn that the deal would maintain the

arbitrary divisions between “just-in-time” and “sub-assembly,” who will soon be working together under one roof at a multi-million dollar facility in Hammond, for which the company received millions in tax breaks. In addition to other regressive changes to work rules, the deal would have included an “automatic” contract extension to a fifth year, 2022, with no guarantee of a wage increase for just-in-time workers.

? Sub-assembly workers would start out at only \$14.25 by the end of the contract in 2021, with top wages capped at \$18 an hour. The union claims the cap would rise to \$19 an hour in 2022.

? Just-in-time workers hired after 2013 would have starting wages of just \$17 an hour, with top pay capped at \$22.08, with five years required to reach that level.

? Legacy workers hired before 2013 would themselves have received only a \$1.74 an hour raise over the life of the contract, an effective pay cut with inflation taken into account.

In an attempt to force older, better-paid workers out, the deal also contained a severance package for those with at least 10 years.

In addition, the agreement contained significant increases to health care costs. For individuals, it would have included a 29 percent increase in weekly premiums over the contract (from \$24 to \$31), a 30 percent increase in deductible (\$250 to \$325), a 16 percent increase in out-of-pocket maximum (\$2,000 to \$2,325), and a 30 percent increase in coinsurance rates (15 to 20 percent). It also included the creation of a new high-deductible health reimbursement account plan—nominally an “option” at the moment—with an individual deductible of \$1,500 and out-of-pocket maximum of \$3,500.

“Supposedly, nothing is going to happen until after the holidays,” a veteran worker at Lear told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “Everyone is peed off at the whole situation. Why the wait? What are they hiding or keeping from us? We’ve heard that there was really not much of a change. Maybe a little ‘rewording.’”

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“Something is very wrong. Nothing like this had EVER happened.”

The union posted statements in the plants Thursday that it would hold “informative meetings” about the deal on November 26 and 27, to be followed almost immediately after by ratifications votes at the new Hammond plant November 29 through December 1.

Another veteran worker questioned whether the union would seek to rig the vote, saying, “Not sure I like the three days of voting, who’s to say they won’t tamper with

ballots?” Workers have long suspected the UAW has engaged in ballot stuffing and fixed votes, particularly during the contract ratification at Ford in 2015.

Workers should demand that the UAW immediately release the full contract proposal and all associated “letters of understanding” and have at least two weeks to study and discuss among themselves before any vote is taken.

The UAW has demonstrated again and again that it is no longer an organization that defends the interests of workers, even in a limited sense. Instead, it functions as a department of company management, engaging in conspiracies with its supposed adversaries at the bargaining table in order to deepen the exploitation of workers. It suppresses strikes and other expressions of opposition, such as at Fiat Chrysler’s Kokomo, Indiana, transmission plants, where it has defied a 99 percent strike authorization vote for nearly six months. It creates endless divisions among workers, whether through the tier and temporary employment system, or through the promotion of poisonous “Buy America” nationalism and hatred of immigrant, Mexican, Chinese, and other foreign workers.

For its services to management, the UAW receives bribes and countless other “perks,” as has been revealed in the unfolding corruption scandal over the last year. It is an outfit that is hostile to workers from top to bottom.

New organizations and a new strategy are required, which take as their starting point the social needs of the working class, not the private profit interests of the corporations. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will provide every assistance possible in this initiative. We urge workers who want to fight for their rights and participate in the formation of rank-and-file committees to contact us today.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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