

“The union and Lear must think we are stupid”

Indiana Lear auto parts workers vote down UAW sellout contract second time

Marcus Day
2 December 2018

Saturday evening, United Auto Workers Local 2335 announced that Lear Corporation auto parts workers in Hammond and Portage, Indiana voted to overwhelmingly reject a company- and union-backed deal for a second time. The ballot results were 311 against and 155 in favor, resulting in a “no” vote of approximately 67 percent, or over two to one.

“We rejected this deal because it was the same thing as before, nothing changed,” a worker at the Portage plant told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, reflecting the broad opposition to the contract. “The union and Lear must think we are stupid.”

The vote is an act of tremendous courage by Lear workers, who have again defied the union’s attempts to ram through the deal. It is an indication of the growing determination to fight back among the working class more broadly, after decades of concessions imposed by the companies with the assistance of the trade unions.

While the “no” vote is welcome and entirely deserved, a warning must be made: the company and the UAW will respond by intensifying their efforts to force workers to accept their terms.

No time must be lost! Workers should immediately initiate discussions to elect and organize rank-and-file factory committees across their plants, independent of the pro-corporate UAW, in order to carry forward the momentum of the “no” vote and prepare the groundwork for launching a genuine struggle.

Workers voted down Lear’s first contract proposal in October. While UAW Local 2335 officials claimed the agreement would “help us support our families with a better wage,” the deal in fact:

- Maintained the hated multi-tier divisions between

“just-in-time” and “sub-assembly” workers;

- Entailed the extension of poverty wages, with starting pay for sub-assembly at an abysmal \$13.50 at the beginning of the contract;
- Significantly increased health care costs, with substantial rises in premiums, deductibles and other out-of-pocket expenses; and,
- Failed to restore any of the concessions previously given up by the UAW, such as cost-of-living adjustments and pensions, among other retrogressive provisions.

In response to workers’ denunciations and anger at the proposal, the UAW doubled down on its attempts to keep workers in the dark about its negotiations with the company. At the same time, as workers increasingly turned to the WSWS, which alone has exposed the rotten character of the company-union agreement and sought to give workers a platform to voice and organize their opposition, the UAW launched a campaign of intimidation aimed at cowering workers into accepting the company’s demands.

After claiming on November 9 that a supposedly new tentative agreement had been reached, the UAW made every attempt to keep workers divided, holding separate “informative” meetings about the deal for each shift at each plant. At the meetings, workers were disgusted to learn what they suspected: the “new” deal was essentially the same as the one they already rejected, with the addition of a few extra “sweeteners.”

“The union’s little divide and conquer crap before the votes didn’t work,” the worker at Portage said. He pointed to the corrupt relationship between the union and the auto companies, in which the UAW has accepted millions of dollars of bribes from Fiat

Chrysler to push through the demands of the corporations. “I honestly think the UAW’s role has been simple: they are trying to force an unfair deal down our throats so the company will continue to line their pockets.”

The “no” vote is an indication of the sharp intensification of the class struggle. Last week, in an opening shot aimed at terrorizing workers into accepting further concessions in the 2019 contract negotiations at the Detroit Three auto companies, General Motors announced plans to shutter five plants in North America and another two overseas, laying off roughly 15,000 production and salaried workers.

Workers have responded with shock and outrage, with over 100—including a number of Lear workers—attending a call-in meeting last Wednesday held by the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* in order to organize opposition to the companies’ attacks.

It is critical that workers at Lear immediately reach out to the workers at GM, Ford and more broadly, both in the US and beyond, in order to prepare a joint counter-offensive for the right to good-paying jobs and decent living conditions. The WSWs will provide every assistance possible and urges workers who want to fight to contact us today.

The WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is holding an emergency meeting in Detroit on December 9 to discuss a strategy for autoworkers to unify their struggle against the companies and the corporate-controlled UAW. Learn more and RSVP here.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact