

“The union and Lear must think we are stupid”

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

Marcus Day
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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 a pro-corporate 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.

Northwest Indiana Lear workers—who build seats for vehicles assembled at the nearby Chicago Ford plant—first voted down the company-union-backed tentative agreement in October. While UAW Local

2335 officials claimed the deal would “help us support our families with a better wage,” the proposal 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 cowing 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.”

Following the announcement of the ballot results, a number of workers posted celebratory comments on Facebook, while some expressed concern that the turnout was lower than the first ratification vote. However, if fewer workers went to the trouble of casting a ballot in the second vote, it is a measure of the disgust with which the UAW and its fraudulent “bargaining” process is viewed.

“People were happy that it was voted down but also disappointed on the turnout,” a worker at the Hammond plant said. “But the word is that the people who didn’t vote, didn’t vote because they hated the contract.”

“We voted it down, and man, I’m glad we did, because they basically didn’t change anything in the contract,” another worker at the Hammond plant said. “Lear’s making money, but they don’t want to give us anything that we can work on, let alone enough to raise a family.”

“They’re just trying to not give us anything. They’re not even trying to meet us halfway. I just think they think we’re a joke, and we’re just going to accept anything, and that’s that. If we do a dollar fifty [raise over the life of the contract], that wouldn’t even keep up with the cost of living.

“Something’s got to change,” he continued. “It’s to the point you can’t even trust the UAW. As far as I’m concerned, they’re in with Lear. They’re taking money out of our checks and say they’re fighting for us, but they’re not.

“I don’t know where we go from here, but I stand with our no vote.”

“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.

The layoffs, if allowed to be carried out, would be a virtual death sentence for workers in cities already devastated by decades of deindustrialization. The plant shutdowns would also have a domino effect on workers in numerous parts, supplier and service industries in the areas targeted, with a low estimate of another 35,000 jobs at risk.

Workers have responded with shock and outrage to GM’s plans, 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 break through the isolation imposed by the UAW and 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. We strongly encourage workers at Lear to organize a delegation to attend and inform other autoworkers about their fight. Learn more and RSVP on Facebook here.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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