

Form rank-and-file committees to advance the fight!

UAW attempts third sellout contract at northwest Indiana Lear auto parts plants

Marcus Day
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In a demonstration of contempt for the will of workers, United Auto Workers Local 2335 informed its members at Lear Corporation's northwest Indiana auto parts plants on Thursday that they would have to vote on the union-company contract proposal for a third time.

Workers at the plants have already courageously voted down UAW-backed deals twice, once in mid-October, by 74 percent, and again at the beginning of December, by 67 percent.

"New" contract packets were quietly distributed to workers throughout the day Thursday. Workers were informed that they would vote on the deal Monday and Tuesday. The UAW has made no public statement on its latest move, seeking to avoid scrutiny by Ford, GM, Fiat Chrysler and other workers, who have closely followed the stand taken by Lear workers.

Lear workers informed the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that the proposal was essentially the same as the first two they voted down, with the addition of larger signing bonuses based on seniority. Such lump-sum payments have long been utilized by the UAW and other unions to try to blackmail workers struggling to get by on poverty wages into accepting concessions contracts. They do nothing to ensure workers' pay keeps up with, let alone surpasses, the rising cost of living.

"The proposed deal is absolutely ridiculous," a worker at the Portage plant told the WWS. "The union and company think that by giving us signing bonuses that it's going to make up for the lack of a pay raise."

"This is supposed to 'entice' people who just 'don't get it,'" another worker at the Hammond plant said. "Folks are still angry about it."

Workers have forcefully rejected the contracts pushed by the UAW, negotiated behind closed doors with the company, because they fail to meet any of their essential demands. It would maintain the arbitrary divisions between "just-in-time" and "sub-assembly" workers, with the latter starting as low as \$13.50 an hour; fail to give adequate raises to legacy workers; significantly increase health care costs, including premiums and deductibles; fail to restore pensions or COLA (cost-of-living raises); and establish a new "job rotation" efficiency scheme, entailing further demands for speed-up and likely to force out older, better-paid workers.

The deal, nominally a four-year contract, would also include an automatic one-year extension. As with the "in-progression" raises at the Detroit-based auto companies—an eight-year pay scale in a four-year contract—any promises of pay increases beyond the life of the contract are worthless. "It's a five-year [deal], but no one knows what's going to go on in the fifth year until it gets here," said the worker at Hammond.

Workers at Lear have viewed the UAW's promotion of the deal with hostility and suspicion. They are determined not to be cheated again, as in 2014, when UAW officials brazenly lied about "eliminating two-tier," when in fact the tier system was expanded and deepened, with "sub-assembly" workers making as little as \$12.10 an hour at a new plant in Portage.

The UAW has repeatedly made clear that it couldn't care less what workers think. It has kept workers on the line despite a 90 percent strike authorization vote in October. After workers massively rejected the first proposal, denouncing it as "a joke" and "BS," Local 2335 officials held phony "feedback" meetings, in

which workers were told the deal “is what it is” and that Lear, a Fortune 500 company that has been making record profits, doesn’t have money to give anything more.

“We were told at one meeting by International [UAW officials] that we already set the high standard, that we are the highest-paying Lear plant,” another veteran worker at the Hammond plant told the WSWS. “So why can’t we set an even higher standard?”

The UAW has combined its signing bonus “carrots” with the “sticks” of threats and intimidation against workers. Workers who have spoken out on Facebook or commented on WSWS articles have reported being harassed by union officials.

Workers have expressed concern that the UAW would seek to use a third “no” vote to maneuver workers into launching an ineffective strike action before the holiday. “Some people are worried that if it’s voted down again they will ‘allow’ us to strike during Christmas shutdown,” the Hammond worker said, “which will only hurt the people not the company, because there’s no production during that time. The whole idea of a strike would be to hurt the company.” Other workers have indicated their fear that the UAW would simply override a third “no” vote, and declare the contract ratified.

Such worries, which are well founded, point to a basic truth: The UAW is not a “union” or “workers organization” in any meaningful sense of those words. It does not unite workers to carry out a struggle, but rather divides them through the tier system and other means, and seeks to block strikes or render them impotent. It has become a corrupt department of company management, deeply hostile to workers’ interests.

Workers should reject this latest attempt to force a sellout down their throat. However, the UAW has shown that it will not accept “no” for an answer, and will only escalate its pressure tactics until workers “get the vote right.” No amount of rank-and-file pressure directed at the union can change this.

The answer to the brazen and arrogant efforts of the UAW to cram this contract down their throats must be the building of new organizations of struggle independent of the union apparatus. The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the creation of rank-and-file factory committees, to take control of all

negotiations and any decisions about a strike out of the hands of the UAW completely. Workers must decide their fate, not the corporate hacks of the UAW!

The fight by Lear workers is part of a broader class struggle, which has dramatically escalated across the world in 2018, from wildcat strikes by teachers in the US to the “yellow vest” protests against social inequality in France. While the UAW has done everything it can to keep workers divided and isolated from each other, momentum is building for a joint struggle for workers’ interests.

Last Sunday, December 9, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* and Socialist Equality Party held a significant meeting in Detroit to organize the opposition by autoworkers to the Detroit Three’s plans for plant shutdowns, layoffs, and new concessions. Delegates at the meeting, including workers from Ford, GM, and Fiat Chrysler, unanimously voted to adopt a resolution to form rank-and-file committees to unify the struggle for the right to decent, good-paying jobs.

To carry forward their fight, it is critical that Lear workers form links with workers throughout the auto industry and beyond. The *Autoworker Newsletter* will provide every assistance possible in this effort, and urges workers who want to join this initiative to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact