

US Navistar workers to vote again on contract after 98 percent “no” vote

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Workers at the Navistar plant in Springfield, Ohio are scheduled to vote again Sunday on a proposed six-year contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers (UAW).

No details have been released ahead of the vote by UAW Local 402, the bargaining agent for workers at the facility that makes commercial trucks. There are more than 1,800 workers at the Springfield assembly plant.

In addition to workers in Springfield, the agreement covers about 400 workers at a Melrose Park, Illinois engineering and engine assembly facility and workers at parts distribution centers in Atlanta, Dallas and York, Pennsylvania, who will also be voting.

On December 2 Navistar workers voted down a contract proposal brought back by the UAW by a 98 percent margin. The contract had expired October 1, but the UAW kept workers on the job while talks continued, refusing to set a strike deadline.

The overwhelming “no” vote by Navistar workers follows multiple contract rejection votes by Lear seating workers in northwest Indiana. It is a further sign of the growth of militancy in the working class and follows statewide strikes by teachers earlier this year, strikes by hotel workers and strike votes by United Parcel Service workers and steelworkers at US Steel and ArcelorMittal. Mass opposition is developing among autoworkers to the announced closure of five General Motors factories in the US and Canada.

Navistar has US production facilities in Arkansas, Indiana, Illinois, Alabama, Oklahoma, Ohio and Mississippi. Globally it has operations in Canada, Mexico, Argentina, China, South Africa and Brazil.

The company is highly profitable. Navistar had pretax income of \$180 million in the third quarter of 2018. Navistar Chairman and CEO Troy Clark collected \$5

million in total compensation in 2017 with an additional \$8.9 million in stock options. Before taking over at Navistar in 2013 Clark worked for GM for 35 years, including as head of GM North America.

In a statement posted on its website the company said of the latest contract, “We are confident that this agreement will help us work as a team to competitively build our vehicles, run our plants and win in the market.” Management has embraced “lean” practices and strategies supposedly to eliminate waste and inefficiencies in the manufacturing process, but in reality aimed largely at squeezing more production and profits out of workers.

The corporatist and anti-worker nature of the relationship between the UAW and Navistar is spelled out in the fact that Jeffrey Dokho, assistant director of the UAW research department, sits on the Navistar board of directors where he earns \$64,834 annually in addition to his \$100,000 plus UAW salary. Dokho replaced former UAW President Dennis Williams on the Navistar board.

Williams is currently under investigation for his role in the UAW corruption scandal which is continuing to make its way through the courts. UAW officials took millions of dollars in bribes from Fiat Chrysler to enforce contracts favorable to the company.

The contract negotiations in 2018 follow years in which Navistar slashed jobs. The Navistar Springfield plant was down to just 300 workers at one point in 2010. Management had been struggling through production problems, including an engine design that failed to meet pollution control standards.

The UAW offered no resistance to plant closures. In 2013 Navistar closed its assembly plant in Garland, Texas with the loss of 900 jobs. In 2014 it completed the closure of its Indianapolis engine and foundry

complex that at one point in the 1990s employed some 2,000 workers.

Since then, employment has been expanded. Last month Navistar launched a new medium duty truck at the Springfield facility aimed at fleet and commercial customers, the product of a joint venture with General Motors.

Currently there is a large demand for commercial trucks. Freight rates are increasing, resulting in bigger profits for trucking companies and encouraging the expansion of truck fleets.

Earlier this year German automaker Volkswagen signaled that it might be interested in taking over Navistar. Last year, Navistar finalized a strategic alliance with Volkswagen Truck and Bus that was supposed to lead to extensive collaboration between the two companies.

VW has been looking to shore up its position in the US market, particularly with the growth of trade war and the threat of import tariffs on automobiles.

At the same time management, with the help of the UAW, has attempted to blackmail workers with the threat of job losses in order to squeeze out more production and cuts costs.

The last agreement signed in 2014 was negotiated under the direction of then UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, who has since been implicated in the UAW corruption scandal. By all measures the 2014 agreement was a sweetheart deal that allowed Navistar to increase its profits.

Navistar workers, having suffered through more than a decade of layoffs and concessions, clearly feel they are in a powerful position to win back past losses. However, there is no indication that the latest contract proposal differs in any respect from the deal rejected less than two weeks ago.

The UAW is clearly hoping that the financial pressures of the Christmas holiday will help compel workers to ratify an inferior deal with the carrot stick of a signing bonus.

No amount of pressure can force the UAW to fight in workers interests. After handing down two overwhelming contract rejection votes workers at Lear in Indiana are presently scheduled to vote on the third attempt by the UAW to impose a sellout deal. What is needed is the creation of rank-and-file committees to take the struggle out of the hands of the UAW,

including the establishment of rank-and-file oversight over negotiations and preparations for strike action.

For their fight to be successful, Navistar workers need to establish lines of communication with workers at Lear, General Motors and other sections of workers coming into struggle. The *WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter* pledges every assistance in this fight. We encourage Navistar workers to contact us to share your views on this struggle and for additional information on the formation of rank-and-file committees in your workplace.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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