

Over massive opposition

UAW announces contract ratification at northwest Indiana Lear auto parts plants

Marcus Day
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Late Tuesday night, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2335 announced the ratification of its contract with auto parts manufacturer Lear Corporation in Hammond and Portage, Indiana, by a razor-thin 50.8 percent margin.

The results, even if the vote count is to be believed, are illegitimate, the outcome of a corrupted “contract negotiation” process. The deal the union claims to have ratified—which maintains the tier system and poverty wages and increases healthcare costs—had already been rejected overwhelmingly by workers twice, first by 74 percent in October and then by 67 percent in November.

The UAW responded to worker opposition to its pro-company proposal by doubling down on its efforts to ram it through, defying a 90 percent strike authorization vote taken in October. It announced last Thursday that it would be forcing a third vote on essentially the same deal workers had rejected, with the addition of a larger signing bonus and a few other paltry “sweeteners” thrown in. It continued to insist that there was “no more money on the table,” despite the fact that Lear, a Fortune 500 company, has been reaping record profits, showering its shareholders with \$4 billion in stock buybacks and dividends since 2011.

The large opposition in the official vote count—359 in favor to 333 against, with 14 “void” ballots—reflects the ongoing and courageous determination of workers in the face of the increasingly desperate efforts of the union and the company to strong-arm them into accepting a sellout deal.

Many workers who voted “yes” in the latest round did so under economic duress, with the UAW threatening job losses or the possibility of a fruitless

and self-defeating strike over the holidays. Throughout the contract struggle, the UAW harassed outspoken or critical workers.

“I heard a lot of people were told if we didn’t vote ‘yes’ that they already had a group to replace us for less pay,” a veteran worker at the Hammond plant said.

Another worker at Hammond reported that Lear management was seeking to influence the outcome directly, “reminding” workers to vote over the PA system yesterday.

Workers have responded with outrage to the ratification announcement. The second worker at Hammond said the moods at the plant Tuesday morning were “angry, mad, somber, disgust, betrayed, pissed, cheated, etc. Stop me anytime.”

“I think we got screwed plain and simple,” said a worker at the Portage plant. “They talk about wanting us to be able to afford better things, yet they forced us to accept a horrible deal knowing that we can’t afford anything with what they stuck us with.

“Management was going around asking if we had voted; if we said ‘no,’ they excused us from the line to go vote.”

“Basically, what we got was the UAW’s version of a Merry Christmas. They get their pockets lined by Lear, and we get a stupid fleece and dinner.”

Janet, a worker at the Hammond plant, wrote to the WSWs and said, “THEY FINALLY GOT IT TO PASS...I’M SICK TO MY STOMACH THIS MORNING!!!”

Workers posted bitter or angry comments on Local 2335’s Facebook page, some asking how to leave the UAW or stating their intention to quit paying dues. “So what is the proper procedure to opt out of this so called

‘union’?” wrote Antalaya. “Might as well keep the \$59 that is taken out of my check monthly to offset the increase in my insurance and whatever else. People will sell their souls for a few coins.”

Hector, a worker at Ford, replied to a worker’s comment denouncing the results by pointing to the UAW corruption scandal. “You need look no further than what’s happening at the international level and it will answer all your questions.”

The UAW’s claim to have ratified the sellout agreement at Lear over massive opposition confirms the warnings made by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*: the UAW is not a workers’ organization, but rather a cheap-labor contractor that is immune to pressure from workers and dedicated to enforcing the company’s will at all costs.

As with other sections of the working class coming into struggle throughout this year—whether teachers in West Virginia and other states, UPS workers, hotel workers or others—Lear workers have found they are up against not just the company, but also the union. “It feels like we’re fighting the union more than the company,” Janet told the *WSWS* on Monday. “My union president acts as if he owns us. Like we’re his property.”

The *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Lear workers to hold emergency meetings and elect new organizations—rank-and-file factory committees independent of the UAW—to discuss the vote and prepare workers’ response.

Given the enormous opposition that has repeatedly been expressed to the contract and the hairs-breadth amount by which it supposedly passed, workers should demand a revote, free from the coercion of the UAW and the company and conducted under the supervision of workers’ committees.

In order to carry forward the struggle and win new gains, such committees should formulate demands based on what workers actually need, such as: an end to the tier system; all workers immediately brought up to full pay with a 40 percent increase; the restoration of COLA, pensions, and health care, to be fully paid for by the company; and an end to the punitive point system.

It is critical that workers at Lear break through the isolation imposed by the UAW and link up with workers at General Motors, Fiat Chrysler, Ford, and

beyond, all of whom are facing a similar fight.

Above all, rank-and-file committees must take as their starting point the fact that workers have class interests separate and opposed to the profit interests of the corporations and their wealthy owners, which are defended tooth and nail by the unions.

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter encourages workers at Lear to contact us today to share their reactions to the vote and discuss the organization of rank-and-file committees.



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