

Ventra Sandusky: Vote “No” on 2020 contract! Form rank-and-file committees to oppose UAW sellout!

The World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers at Ventra’s Sandusky, Ohio plant to reject the latest sellout offer presented by the United Auto Workers and to form a rank-and-file committee to organize opposition to the joint company-union attack on their safety and standard of living.

After maintaining a virtual blackout on contract negotiations for months, officials in UAW Local 1216 announced on December 8 that a tentative bargaining agreement had been reached between the union and auto parts manufacturer Ventra. Despite nominal wage increases, the new agreement is essentially a re-hash of the previous proposal, which workers overwhelmingly rejected in October.

The UAW has kept workers on the job without a contract since July, when the previous agreement expired, even as COVID-19 has continued to spread throughout the plant, which employs 2,200 workers.

In his most recent letter, dated December 4, Local 1216 President Brett Whyde continued to downplay the impact of the virus and its significance, casually noting that “there are 20 new cases this week, 31 confirmed cases currently out of the facility, 62 confirmed cases year to date, and 60 employees out for symptoms/exposure.”

Whyde then concluded his letter by implying that it is the workers themselves who are responsible for the spread of the virus, echoing the statements of management: “As this virus is once again knocking on our doorstep we must be our Sisters and Brothers [sic] keepers, so please watch out for one another.”

It is highly significant that despite the pandemic, the new agreement makes no references to the virus. Indeed, the words “COVID-19,” “pandemic,” “virus” or “vaccine” do not appear anywhere in the proposal.

The absence of any provisions intended to safeguard the

lives of workers in the midst of the greatest public health crisis in the world is not an unfortunate oversight on the part of the UAW. It in fact demonstrates the fact that the union is opposed to the basic class interests of the autoworkers it falsely claims to represent. Anything that acts as an impediment to the profit interests of the corporations is impermissible, including basic safety measures.

This point is underscored by the fact that the union has refused to call a strike despite an overwhelming strike authorization vote by workers. In October, the union attempted to throw cold water on workers by declaring that any decision on a strike had to be approved by the International UAW in Detroit. The local officials know full well that the International, a coterie of gangsters whose numbers have been decimated by a bribery and corruption probe by the FBI, has no intention of approving a strike. Whyde and other officials have absolved themselves of any responsibility while at the same time peddling the lie that workers need “permission” to carry out a struggle. While attempting to pass the buck to Solidarity House, Local 1216 is demonstrating that the local officialdom is just as much an agent of management as the national bureaucrats.

The hostility of the UAW to a work stoppage is behind the efforts of the union to ram through this latest proposal. Workers have been given less than 48 hours to review the agreement before voting takes place today and tomorrow.

In a document highlighting the changes in the new agreement, the bargaining committee congratulates itself for securing “\$27.5 million in new money and no concessions.” There is no reason to assume that this is true, given the fact that the UAW has made similar claims about every concessions contract it has forced through for decades. Even so, this paltry figure represents roughly just

0.25 percent of owner Shahid Khan's \$10.88 billion fortune. Moreover, the union has also carried over the "No Strikes/No Lockouts" clause from its 2016 contract, itself representing a significant concession to the company.

In fact, the new proposal maintains the rolling-back of starting poverty wages for new hires from \$15.30 to \$15 an hour (a fact conveniently left out of the bogus one-page "highlights" released by the union), as well as reducing the signing bonus from \$1,700 to \$1,500. The union touts the inclusion of a "perfect attendance" bonus of \$200 every six months. This is particularly dangerous given the current spread of the pandemic and a signal that the union is doing everything it can to keep production going.

Meatpacking company Tyson used similar attendance bonus schemes to keep workers on the job at its pork plant in Waterloo in the spring, as more than 1,000 workers at the plant contracted COVID and five died. Even while it was lying to workers and the public and claiming that no infections were taking place, Tyson's plant supervisors were privately taking bets on how many workers would ultimately get sick.

A "no" vote, while necessary, is not enough, because the UAW will simply come back as before with the same contract until workers vote the "right" way. Workers at Ventra must take matters into their own hands and form a rank-and-file committee in opposition to both management and the UAW. Autoworkers at plants throughout the industry have formed their own safety committees to demand necessary safety measures, including the shutdown of nonessential industries, with full pay guaranteed to workers during quarantine and shutdowns.

To learn more about forming a rank-and-file safety committee at your plant, contact the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* at autoworkers@wsws.org.



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