

Ventra Evert workers: Vote YES to authorize a strike! Demand a deadline for a walkout and prepare a real fight for higher wages!

Ventra Evert Workers Rank-and-File Committee
8 July 2022

The following is a statement of the rank-and-file committee of auto parts workers at the Ventra Evert plant in central Michigan. Roughly 1,000 workers make plastic moldings and other auto components at the plant, which is a subsidiary of the global parts maker Flex-N-Gate. Workers voted by 95 percent nearly two weeks ago to reject a contract unanimously backed by the UAW bargaining team.

After initially scheduling a strike authorization vote for Sunday, July 10, UAW Local 2270 announced on Friday that it was rescheduling the vote to Thursday, July 14, claiming that the high school where it was to take place Sunday had cancelled the reservation. Workers told the WSWs that the further delay has provoked outrage at the plant.

To contact the committee and discuss getting involved, text 231-335-7049 or email ventrarfc@gmail.com. To share your thoughts on the strike vote delay and what workers should be fighting for, fill out the form at the end of the statement.

The Ventra Evert Workers Rank-and-File Committee calls for the broadest possible turnout and YES vote to authorize a strike. The time has come to draw a line in the sand and say: We will not settle until we have enough money to live, enough time with our families and a decent, safe workplace.

Almost two weeks ago, we showed what we thought of that joke of a contract, voting it down by 95 percent. The UAW's deal would have made us poorer than we already are for the next five years. What has happened since then?

The UAW has stalled day after day. They extended the last contract, agreeing to a 72-hour waiting period before any strike begins. They have kept us on the job while the company is stockpiling parts and pounding us with mandatory overtime this weekend. They have gone back to their secret talks with management, keeping us in the dark over what is supposedly negotiating.

On Friday, Local 2270 suddenly announced that strike vote scheduled for Sunday had to be delayed...because the high school cancelled their reservation. The UAW claimed

that "local bylaws" then required them to move the vote date.

Do they think we're stupid?

We made perfectly clear that the last contract is nowhere near what we need. Why has it taken this long for a strike vote to be held, after the last contract expired and after talks have been going on with the company for months? The UAW's stall tactics are working entirely in the company's favor, and they have to end.

UAW reps had been going around the plant saying that they want everyone to vote yes to authorize a strike. They've been trying to save face and make it seem like they're going to "go back to the bargaining table" and fight for us. But actions speak louder than words.

The UAW has time and again blocked strikes with "last-minute" deals, which turn out to be just as bad as the ones workers had previously voted down.

Earlier this year, workers at Detroit Diesel who make engines for Daimler Trucks, voted by 98 percent to authorize a strike. The union announced a last-minute deal before the strike deadline and called a snap vote, but workers voted down the UAW-endorsed contract by 79 percent. But the union then turned around and just a few days later announced another deal, almost exactly the same as the first. Is it any coincidence UAW President Ray Curry sits on the "Board of Supervisors" of Mercedes-Benz, Detroit Diesel's parent company?

At GM Subsystems, the UAW set a strike deadline for June 30 and again announced a deal just hours before the walkout was supposed to start, which workers are voting on this coming Monday and Tuesday. Workers at Subsystems make wages as low as \$14 an hour, because the UAW allowed GM to lower wages when it created this subsidiary.

No one should have any doubt that the UAW has every intention of pulling a similar fast one on us. We're in a fight not just against the company but the UAW bureaucrats too. The union executives are especially determined to prevent

auto parts workers like us from walking out *because* we have so much potential power.

Dealers are desperate for inventory. The Big Three and Tesla are starved for parts. Ventra is already having trouble hiring and keeping workers. A strike could quickly bring the auto industry to its knees—especially if we have our brothers and sisters at other Flex-N-Gate plants and the Big Three automakers behind us.

We know that there has to be a fight in order for us to see significant and lasting gains. But we need a strategy and resources in order to win. **Our committee says the following is needed in order for our struggle to be successful:**

- **Once a strike is authorized, a deadline for a walkout must be immediately set.** No more foot-dragging by the UAW! The longer we're strung out on day-to-day contract extensions, the more time the company has to stockpile parts, hire more people and make strikebreaking plans.

- **Full strike pay from the giant UAW strike fund!** Where have all our dues been going? We know where—to fund the lavish lifestyles and perks of the UAW executives. The UAW has more than \$800 million in its strike fund, and this money, which is ours, must be deployed to support our struggle.

- **Rank-and-file workers' oversight of all contract talks!** There is no legitimate reason for the UAW's hush-hush tactics, which keep us in the dark and uninformed on what's coming. All contract talks should be livestreamed so that every worker can stay informed and participate in what's being discussed. The bargaining committee which endorsed the last sellout should be thrown out, and negotiations must be supervised by a committee of workers elected from the shop floor, ones who have the trust and confidence of all workers.

Rumors are going around that the company will threaten to move production to the Ventra plant in Sandusky, Ohio. But our brothers and sisters in Ohio went through virtually the same struggle against the company and the UAW in 2020. Workers there voted by three to one to reject the UAW's pro-company contract, which lowered starting wages and extended the time it takes to reach full pay. If we appeal for support from workers at Sandusky, they will respond.

What the companies and the UAW are most afraid of is workers mobilizing together across the plants. That's why they split up Ventra and Flex-N-Gate workers on different contracts. We should all be on one agreement, so we can actually leverage our collective strength!

If there's to be a strike, workers have to know what we're fighting for. We put forth the following demands, based on what workers need to live, not what the company or the UAW claims is affordable:

Major wage increases and COLA to make up for surging prices and years of stagnating pay! If inflation stays at 8.6 percent a year, prices would be up by *43 percent* at the end of a five-year contract, meaning even a \$5 raise wouldn't be enough to keep up. For a worker making \$15 an hour, anything less than a \$7 raise would mean they're losing money to inflation.

- **Lower health and dental costs, not higher ones!**

- **No more being jerked around on forced overtime! We need predictable schedules that allow us to spend time with our families!**

- **Adequate and regular heat breaks during the summer!**

- **Workers' control over line speed and safety!**

COVID-19 has opened our eyes. We have realized the importance of having enough time with our families, time to have a life and enjoy it.

The elite and billionaires like Shahid Khan are enjoying the wealth that we make. Now they're making us go back and risk our lives again. They call us "essential," but they treat us like we're disposable commodities.

We have to oppose any efforts by Ventra or the UAW to pit us against each other—by line, by department, full-time against probationary, parts workers against Big Three workers, or any other way they may try. Every worker deserves a raise across the board. We can't conquer if we're divided. We have to stand together if we're to have power.

We call on all our brothers and sisters at Ventra and Flex-N-Gate: **Contact us and join and help build our committee.** And we appeal to workers throughout the parts industry and at the Big Three: Support our fight! We are taking a stand not just for ourselves but for autoworkers and the working class as a whole.

To contact the committee and discuss getting involved, text 231-335-7049 or email ventrarfc@gmail.com. To share your thoughts with the WSWS on the strike vote, working conditions or what workers should be fighting for, fill out the form below. Your anonymity will be protected.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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