

What way forward at Ventra Evart after the strike vote?

Ventra Evart Workers Rank-and-File Committee
13 July 2022

The following is a statement of the rank-and-file committee of auto parts workers at the Ventra Evart 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.

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

Brothers and sisters, where do we stand?

It has been 17 days since we responded with a resounding “NO!” to the insulting contract offer worked out between management and the UAW bargaining team.

With no discussion and no vote, the union imposed open-ended contract extensions, with a 72-hour cooling-off period in the event of a strike call. The union has stalled and stalled again. They gave the company plenty of time to stock parts and attempt to bring in new hires in the hopes of using them as scabs against a strike. On Thursday, we’ll finally be taking a strike vote, almost two weeks after the contract expiration deadline.

What do we face after the strike authorization? No one should have any doubt that the UAW executives will do everything they can to avoid calling a strike. They are continuing to meet behind closed doors with management, seeking to work out a repackaged deal. But any contract which comes out of secret, backroom talks between Ventra and the UAW will inevitably fail to meet our needs. Why else would they keep us in the dark?

In the event that the UAW bureaucracy feels it has no choice but to call a strike, they will immediately seek to isolate us and shut it down as quickly as possible. The main priority of UAW President Ray Curry and others at “Solidarity House” is to limit disruption to the auto industry and protect the profit interests of the corporations—not our interests.

Rumors are already circulating that workers who strike will be fired. These are the predictable intimidation tactics of corporate management and their enforcers in the UAW. They want to cow us into submission.

We know that a strike is serious business and is not something to take lightly. But we will never get what we need and what we deserve without a struggle. The eight-hour day, COLA, company-provided health care, pensions: our grandparents and great-grandparents had to fight for these things tooth and nail. The corporations and the UAW have been taking these gains back, one by one, for decades. Where will it end if we don’t take a stand?

We’re not making enough to live as it is. Annual inflation is now at 9.1 percent. A family of four with both parents working here can’t keep two cars in the driveway and food on the table.

We make the products that bring record profits to Flex-N-Gate, the Big Three and Tesla. The richest people in the world are living off our labor, playing in outer space, while we work for poverty wages, on forced overtime, in filthy and dangerous factories. Just this morning, another worker was taken out on a stretcher!

If we’re to win, we must prepare and approach what lies ahead with open eyes. Above all, we have to have a strategy to expand our fight and the resources to sustain it. We believe the following is needed for our struggle

to succeed:

Form rank-and-file strike committees to reach out to workers at Flex-N-Gate and the Big Three. Our fight cannot be won in Evart alone. We cannot allow our strike to remain isolated. Rank-and-file strike committees should be formed in order to fan out and call on our Ventra and Flex-N-Gate brothers and sisters in Ionia, Detroit, Sandusky and other locations to join our struggle. An appeal should also be made to workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis/Chrysler not to handle any scab parts in the event of a strike.

- **Demand a deadline for a walkout be set immediately following the strike authorization.** We all know that there's overwhelming support for a strike. As soon as the authorization vote is concluded, a strike deadline must be set, without further delay, which only gives the company a greater advantage. In addition, real preparations must begin immediately for a walkout.

- **Workers' oversight of all contract talks and balloting.** There is no reason the negotiations should not be livestreamed, so that every one of us can watch, monitor progress and make proposals. We need a process that is open and transparent!

- **Full income for strikers from the \$800 million UAW strike fund.** We have paid dues to the UAW every paycheck for years. The strike fund was built up with our money, and must be used to support our fight and those of other workers, not as a slush fund for the UAW apparatus.

UAW International Rep. Dan Kosheba sought to humiliate us into accepting Ventra's first offer. "You're not the Big Three," he said, so we won't get their pay and benefits.

This is a bad faith argument. The UAW has worked with the companies to drive down wages and working conditions at the parts makers and the Big Three for more than 30 years. Parts workers used to make almost as much as those at the Big Three, and many of the plants used to be owned by the Big Three. But the companies and the union have used the auto parts plants as a staging ground for testing out new attacks, from the tier system, to higher health costs, to endless mandatory overtime.

If we win higher wages, Big Three workers will be strengthened. If Ventra and the UAW push through concessions, workers at the Big Three will be next.

The UAW always says, "This is what the company says it can afford, you have to accept it." Our committee says, this is what workers need to live decent lives and raise our families:

- Major wage increases and COLA to make up for surging prices and years of stagnating pay!

- 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!

Our brothers and sisters throughout the auto industry have been frustrated and abused right alongside us. How many of us have family members at other auto plants? They are waiting for a struggle to erupt. We can win their support and we will.

We're part of a working class movement which is building up in the US and all over the world against inflation, low wages and degrading workplaces. If workers organize ourselves, communicate with each other, link up and coordinate these struggles, we can make a real breakthrough and win a better life.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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