

Following overwhelming rejection of first deal

UAW announces second tentative agreement for parts workers at Ventra Evart

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On Wednesday, United Auto Workers Local 2270 announced a second tentative agreement with parts maker Ventra at its Evart, Michigan plant. Workers rejected the first TA overwhelmingly by 95 percent last month. The contract covers more than 1000 workers who make headlamp assemblies, plastic injection moldings and other parts for multiple Jeep models, Ford, General Motors and Tesla.

Two weeks ago, the rank-and-file voted to authorize strike action by a 98 percent margin. Since then, however, the UAW has stalled for time, refusing to call a strike. Flouting the strike vote, it continued to meet behind closed doors with Ventra negotiators. These tactics have only frustrated and enraged the workforce, which continues to labor in sweatshop conditions on forced overtime and for poverty wages. Many workers have to carpool and share babysitters because they can't afford the gas to get to work and the money to take care of their kids.

A severe outbreak of COVID-19 is racing through the shop, infecting many workers and idling multiple production lines, while the union has refused to take any action that would alleviate the spread and protect the workers.

Temperatures in the plant regularly rise above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) and the company refuses to grant even contractually stipulated heat breaks, which the union passively accepts. Members of the Ventra Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded after the first contract rejection to oppose union collusion with the company, report to the WSWs that on a daily basis

workers have been taken out of the plant on stretchers, having collapsed from heat stroke or kidney failure because of the extreme heat.

Details of the new contract have not been released as of this writing. But given the conditions in which it was “negotiated,” there can be no doubt that the new TA will offer no basic improvements over the last one. The tersely-worded announcement of the new deal does not acknowledge the landslide rejection of the first deal: “Sisters and Brothers, on behalf of your Bargaining Committee we would like to announce that we have come to a second Tentative Agreement ... as we work on finalizing details, please see below the outlined dates and times of events.”

The union clearly anticipates an explosion of opposition to the new deal. The announcement states that the contract information meeting Sunday “will be for questions regarding the new tentative agreement ... Everyone will be expected to conduct themselves in a respective(sic) manner.” Workers will be forced to vote on the deal Wednesday, before they have had adequate time to study the agreement.

One Ventra worker and supporter of the Rank-and-File Committee told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I’m not even optimistic. I just want to see what the hell they are trying to put out there. I don’t think it’s anything other than the same contract with a little bit of lipstick, a little fluff to it. We deserve a living wage. \$2.50 over 5 years is not a raise. In real terms it’s a pay cut. And they are taking that out of our medical coverage.”

Another supporter of the committee said: “A lot of people want to know why, if the union has a tentative agreement, they don’t give it to us now. They are just stalling us until Sunday [when an informational meeting has been called]. We say, ‘You need to give us the

information RIGHT NOW! the copy of the Proposed Contract right now and let us deal with the fluff and either we strike, or we vote.”

The supporter continued, “We just want it out now. We are tired of screwing around. Now the union wants us to wait ‘til Sunday to get the information and then until Wednesday for a vote. People are catching on to these stalling tactics. They are having a fit because they have to wait until Sunday and then everyone has got to go on Sunday, their day off, just to get the information.

“They should have brought that s*** and hand delivered it to everybody in that facility the day that they came up with it. They say they want to have a meeting on it. OK, fine and dandy! ANSWER QUESTIONS LATER! Give us the information! We are all competent enough to read. We’ve got nothing. We’ve got no job stability. We’ve got no control over our jobs. We can’t even do our jobs the way that we need to do them in the first place. You can’t even take any pride in your work.”

A Rank and File Committee member described the current spread of Covid in the plant. “This is the third major outbreak. All of my co-workers are out on COVID now. There are people on administrative leave in every department. On Thursday night, the Tesla line was not even running. There are probably 12 people on that line and they had that line shut down. The whole plant has been infected and the union has done nothing about it. They don’t care. We’re just numbers.

He went on to explain his recent trip to the hospital which revealed the increasing severity of the disease. “They were asking all kinds of questions, like if I was having abnormal bleeding ... The risk of blood clots is tremendous. There’s a lady at my shop who is still having problems with blood clots after having caught COVID at the plant in October.

“My brain is still not functioning. It’s like I’m thinking through a cloud. I wouldn’t doubt it’s brain damage because my memory just goes. I’m talking about something then I stop and I can’t remember the next word that was coming out of my mouth.”

Workers should organize to vote down the second TA. But the critical question is what comes after. In a July 13 statement, the Ventra Rank and File Committee said:

“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 ... [and] our Ventra and Flex-N-Gate brothers and sisters in Ionia, Detroit, Sandusky and other locations (including at Tenneco) to join our struggle.” Workers at the nearby Tenneco plant in Greenville voted down two similar tentative agreements at poverty pay, and they are still working without a contract while the union is blocking strike action. “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.”

The statement concluded, “Demand a deadline for a walkout be set immediately following the strike authorization ... Workers’ oversight of all contract talks and balloting ... 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.”

If workers are to break from the grip of the UAW, they must join the movement to build rank and file committees at every factory and take control of our own conditions, negotiations and strike actions. That is the aim of the campaign of Will Lehman for UAW International President. On Monday, Lehman issued a statement in support of the Ventra struggle:

“Ventra workers have every right to take action to end these terrible sweatshop conditions and protect their lives,” he said. “Our brothers and sisters at Ventra are being worked to death to fill the company’s orders to automakers and maintain Ventra’s profits.

“The infection of workers from COVID-19 is totally unacceptable! This disease has already killed more than 1 million people in the US and thousands of workers because the companies and union bureaucrats think profit is more important than our lives.

“I fully support the call by the Ventra Workers Rank-and-File Committee for the setting of an immediate strike date.”



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