

Rank-and-file Committee at Renault-Nissan plant in India opposes union attempt to ram through wage-cutting contract

Renault-Nissan Workers Rank-and-File Committee-Chennai
28 December 2022

The following statement was issued by the recently formed Renault-Nissan Rank-and-File Committee-Chennai to oppose the attempt of the state-recognized trade union and the labour federation with which it is allied to impose a concessionary contract through a grossly undemocratic ratification procedure.

The contract covering the 3,000 permanent workers at the Renault-Nissan car assembly plant expired in 2018. For years, the unions submitted to a phony, government-backed arbitration process, and insisted workers not strike or take any other job action for fear of company reprisals. Faced with growing rank-and-file opposition, the RNITS and the United Labour Federation suddenly switched course a few weeks back, announced that they no longer wanted to participate in arbitration, and appealed to the company for talks. However, the unions continued to keep workers entirely in the dark about the contract negotiations.

Then on Dec. 22, the unions announced via a WhatsApp account that they had reached a tentative agreement with the transnational automaker and provided a bare-bones explanation of a few of its key terms. The next day on entering the plant, workers were presented with a union-issued sheet of paper that outlined some details of the proposed contract, including the schedule of wage increases. They were instructed by union officials to immediately indicate whether they endorsed the agreement or not by ticking a box at the bottom of the sheet.

By the time the plant began a previously scheduled more than week-long shut down on Dec. 24, union officials claimed that 75 percent of the workers had “voted.” They claim the remaining 25 percent will be allowed to vote when the plant resumes operation in the

New Year.

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Defeat the conspiracy between Renault-Nissan management, RNITS and the United Labour Federation to impose a sell-out contract through an illegitimate, anti-democratic process!

The Renault-Nissan Rank-and-File Committee-Chennai (RNRFC) calls upon our fellow Renault-Nissan workers to join us in opposing the fraudulent vote that the Renault-Nissan India Thozhilalar Sangam (RNITS) and the United Labour Federation (ULF) have organized on the new contract agreement they have reached with management.

The vote is an anti-democratic sham.

We workers have not been provided the full contract, only a few highlights, selected by the unions to cast the agreement in the best light.

The RNITS and ULF allowed the company to drag on negotiations for four years—longer the three-year life of the proposed new agreement. Yet union officials sought to pressure us into voting on it after having just 24 hours, and in most cases far less, to apprise ourselves of the few contract details we were given and evaluate them.

No meetings were organized so that we workers could ask questions of our supposed union “representatives” about the proposed contract and its implications.

Nor we were given time to discuss the proposed contract amongst ourselves.

If this were not bad enough, the RNITS and ULF, no doubt working hand-in-glove with Renault-Nissan, organized for the vote to be held when large numbers of workers were due to return to their home villages

during a plant shutdown, making it even more difficult to discuss among ourselves how we should respond.

For more than four years, the unions kept us entirely in the dark about what was happening in the arbitration/negotiation with Renault-Nissan. Now, fearing growing rank-and-file anger over their inaction, the unions have connived with management to ambush us—forcing us to vote on-the-spot on an agreement that we haven't seen, let alone studied and discussed.

Those details that the unions have made available reveal why. The proposed contract sells out our basic interests.

The proposed salary increases are below the official inflation rate of 6.7 percent. In other words, the union is pushing for us to accept a real-terms wage cut. Meanwhile, they are rewarding themselves with a big payoff and at our expense. The agreement calls for 15,000 rupees to be taken from the pay of every permanent worker next month—over and above the regular union dues—for a total of roughly 52.8 million rupees, to meet the unions' "legal" charges.

If the RNITS and ULF are ready to agree to such terms, it is possible—indeed more than likely—that they have agreed to other important concessions in respect to working conditions, including line-speed and safety, behind our backs.

We cannot let the unions' anti-worker, anti-democratic ratification process and this sellout agreement stand. The RNRFC-Chennai calls on all our co-workers to raise and fight for the following demands:

1. The current vote must be immediately halted and the ballots destroyed, so that a new legitimate vote on the proposed contract—a vote that respects basic democratic principles—can be organized.

2. The full proposed agreement must be made available to every worker before any voting date or dates are set.

3. After the release of the agreement, workers must be given at least three weeks so they can seriously study and discuss it, prior to any ratification vote.

4. One or more meetings of all Renault-Nissan workers must be held so that workers can discuss the agreement and question union leaders as to its contents.

5. Workers cannot have any confidence in the unions to organize a fair voting process. Therefore, the whole

voting process, including the counting of ballots must be transparent and subjected to the scrutiny of democratically elected representatives of rank-and-file workers.

6. Steps should be taken to inform all non-permanent workers of the current state of the contract negotiations, and to initiate a common struggle with them to eliminate the arbitrary divisions that Renault-Nissan uses to divide us and thereby increase its profits.

Renault-Nissan Rank-and-File Committee-Chennai

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