

UAW tells Lear auto parts workers: “Why are you crying and complaining about the contract?”

Marcus Day
15 September 2023

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The United Auto Workers union is continuing to keep nearly 1,000 Lear Seating auto parts workers in Hammond, Indiana, on the job after they voted down a third UAW-endorsed sellout contract on September 8. Workers voted down the tentative agreement, virtually unchanged from the first two they rejected, by an overwhelming three-to-one margin.

According to multiple workers, the UAW has agreed to rolling 24-hour contract extensions with Lear, despite the fact that 94 percent of the membership of Local 2335 voted to authorize a strike a month ago, on August 15.

The rebellion by Lear workers is part of the growth of anger and opposition throughout the auto industry and beyond. Lear workers, like their brothers and sisters at the Big Three, are determined to put an end to the wage and benefit tier system, win cost-of-living protections and major pay increases, and to reverse years of concessions and deteriorating working conditions.

The UAW International and President Shawn Fain have completely blacked out the struggle of Lear workers, fearful that their defiant stand against more concessions would inspire workers throughout the Big Three and auto parts companies. Fain has made no mention of Lear workers in his weekly livestream “updates,” and the UAW has issued no press releases

about their contract rejections.

The UAW’s refusal to call a strike at Lear coincides with its efforts to keep virtually all of its 150,000 members at Ford, GM and Stellantis on the job after the expiration of their contracts on September 15, despite widespread sentiment among workers for an all-out strike. On Friday, Fain and the UAW leadership called strikes at only three Big Three plants: GM Wentzille, Stellantis Toledo North Assembly, and the paint and final assembly departments of Ford Michigan Assembly.

While Fain’s administration has postured as “militant” in relation to the Big Three contracts, the blatantly anti-democratic methods it has employed against Lear workers reveal the real, pro-corporate face of the bureaucracy it oversees. At both Lear and the Big Three, the UAW apparatus is seeking to once again enforce massive concessions and prevent a united struggle by workers.

“We the people of UAW Local 2335 have felt that our union and UAW have let us down,” a veteran Lear worker told the WSWS. “We’re being kept in the dark with a lot of things. Our union leaders say, ‘The company this, the company that.’”

“They say they bargained in good faith and they don’t understand why we’re angry about the outcome of the contract. Our president is very nonchalant with our concerns. We’ve expressed our concerns and our interests. A lot of my colleagues, even before I got there, they gave, they gave, they gave, they gave to the company, and now they feel that it’s time to get back some of that stuff.”

The contracts the UAW International and Local 2335 officials have been touting as “great” at Lear would

raise starting pay from \$15.50 to only \$17, still a poverty wage. Wage increases for the top pay rate would be kept below the rate of inflation, while healthcare costs for workers would increase dramatically. The proposals have not contained cost-of-living adjustments, pensions or supplementary unemployment benefits, central demands by workers.

In attempting to force through its deal with the company, the UAW has combined lies with attempts to demean and intimidate workers, threatening their jobs.

“They’ve made it seem like the pay raise is the best they could do,” the worker continued. “The president told us, ‘I don’t know why you’re complaining and crying.’”

“Our local chairman, Joe Taylor, said, ‘If you guys don’t like it, you can find another job.’ Or, ‘If you guys turn down another contract, all they’re going to do is hire another company to replace you guys.’ Stuff like that, not encouraging or standing behind the members.

“It’s not just me, a lot of Lear employees feel the same way. It’s really concerning and scary.”

As it has throughout the whole working class, the impact of inflation and stagnating and declining wages have made life extremely difficult for workers at Lear, making each day increasingly a struggle to survive.

“My mortgage is \$1,650 a month,” the worker continued. “I have to save almost two checks to pay my mortgage and still have to buy groceries and gas to go to work. Sometimes I have to not eat so my family can, because of the way the economy is. We’re not trying to break the bank, but we want what’s fair.

“The raise for top pay to \$27 an hour in the next four years, it’s really not that good. Especially with inflation going up every year. We only asked for \$30. And they told us, no, that they’re not going to try to go for that. That we’re being ungrateful. So I’m flabbergasted. And I’m also very irritated.

“Some of us work 50, 60 hours. I know one guy, he worked a total of 18 days. Just to fix his car and pay his bills.

“And our insurance and dues continue to go up. And for our president and chairman to say we’re getting a great deal is absurd. Sure, they eliminated the tiers, but we feel with that they really had no choice because they knew Ford and other automakers were going to get rid of the tiers anyway. We asked for profit sharing, more

vacation time and sick days, and our leaders as well as the company have ignored us. This is why we are turning down the contract. To me the pay increase isn’t bad, but it can be better.

“To hear our leaders say we can’t go on strike because we are a supplier is ridiculous. Why ask us for our vote if you’re going to make us take a deal that we don’t want?”

The worker said that the UAW International has been just as indifferent as the local officials to their concerns.

“I emailed our UAW president Mr. Fain and have heard nothing yet. If we’re all UAW, then he needs to act with us and not treat us like our leaders are, saying that ‘we are just a supplier and we don’t make cars like they do, it’s just seats.’ I get so angry when I hear them say that. We are away from our families, wives, children, and sometimes we miss out on special events due to being denied the day off request because of staff shortage.”

Since 2018, workers at the Lear Hammond plant have rejected a total of five UAW-backed contracts. But the union bureaucracy has shown again and again that it will not respect the will of the workers and that it will continue forcing them to vote on the same agreement until it gets the result it wants.

The key question is for workers to form structures under their own control, rank-and-file committees, which will provide a means to link up with workers at Ford, Stellantis and other companies, and lay the groundwork for an all-out strike across the auto industry.



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