

UAW seeks to ram through fourth sellout contract at Indiana Lear auto parts plant

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Fresh off the imposition of pro-company deals at the Big Three automakers, the United Auto Workers is attempting to force through a fourth sellout agreement at the Lear Seating plant in Hammond, Indiana, at ratification votes Thursday and Friday. The Lear plant employs close to 1,000 workers, who make seats for the nearby Ford Chicago Assembly plant.

The deal backed by UAW Local 2335 and the UAW International officials is virtually unchanged from the previous three union-endorsed agreements that Lear workers have rejected since early August, by 95 percent, 75 percent, and 72 percent respectively. The primary difference from previous agreements is a slightly higher signing bonus and a pathetic 47 cent increase to top pay.

“Our bargaining committee is trying to trick us,” Michael, a Lear worker, told the WSWs (all names have been changed to protect workers from retaliation). “They keep on offering bigger and bigger signing bonuses.”

Jonathan, another Lear worker, said, “No incentives, no cost-of-living. No SUB [supplemental unemployment benefit] pay, no pensions. No nothing.”

Under the agreement, the top rate for wages would rise just \$3, or roughly 12 percent, from the current \$24.44 an hour to \$27.50 in 2026, an increase that would not even make up for overall US inflation of more than 13 percent since April 2021. The UAW’s highlights state that current workers on the “just-in-time” tier would receive pitiful lump sum payments of \$2,000 this year and in 2024, and \$1,000 in 2025, which do not increase base wages. For new hires, meanwhile, starting pay would rise to just \$18 an hour by 2025, a poverty wage.

The inadequate raises would also be substantially eaten up by an increase in workers’ healthcare premiums, deductibles and out-of-pocket costs. In-network deductibles would rise from the current rate of \$350 for an individual to \$475, a 35 percent increase. For families, they would rise from \$750 to \$950, a 26 percent rise. In each case, they would increase the likelihood that workers would be forced into debt just to pay for routine injuries and illnesses, or avoid necessary medical care.

The UAW and company have claimed that the deal would

eliminate the wage tier division between “just-in-time” and “sub-assembly” employees. But workers have expressed skepticism over these claims, based on their bitter previous experience with such promises. In 2014, the UAW previously declared it had “eliminated tiers” at Lear after a one-day “Hollywood” strike. Workers were later to learn that the UAW had agreed to the creation of the new “sub-assembly” tier, which was moved to another plant.

Lear workers should once again take a stand and vote “no” to reject this pro-company agreement, which would send a clear message that workers’ interests are non-negotiable.

But the UAW bureaucracy has made abundantly clear that it will not take workers’ “no” for an answer. It is therefore necessary for workers to take control of the situation. A rank-and-file committee should be formed, made up of workers on every shift and in every department, to prepare for strike action if the contract is rejected and to enforce a strike deadline set by the membership.

Moreover, no trust can be placed in the UAW’s willingness to conduct a fair ratification vote, which it has repeatedly held inside the plant over workers’ objections. Delegations of workers should organize to monitor voting and ensure there is no ballot-stuffing by the bureaucracy.

In utter disregard for workers’ 94 percent strike authorization vote on August 15, the UAW has kept Lear workers on the job for months after their contract expired on August 11. The UAW has adamantly refused to call a strike at the plant, even after the expiration of the Big Three autoworkers’ contracts in September, exposing the fraud of UAW President Shawn Fain’s claims to be leading a militant, “historic” struggle against the companies.

In October, Fain called out the Chicago Ford Assembly plant as part of his limited, fraudulent “stand up strikes,” which kept the vast majority of autoworkers on the job producing profits. The strike at Ford quickly led to the idling of the Lear plant, which supplies Ford on a “just-in-time model.” Outrageously, the UAW refused Lear workers strike pay from its \$825 million strike fund, despite their overwhelming vote in favor of a walkout, instead forcing them to apply for unemployment, which is capped at \$390 a week in Indiana.

“We were laid off the whole month of October,” Jonathan

said. “People lost their cars, people have lost their homes. And we’re still playing catch up. And you know what? The UAW took out our dues for October early, on September 28.”

The contract vote at Lear this week follows other efforts by the UAW apparatus to smother resistance and force through pro-corporate deals in the wake of its betrayal of the Big Three autoworkers struggle.

But there is substantial opposition among auto parts workers to the demands that they must accept substandard wages and benefits. Over the weekend, Allison Transmission workers in Indianapolis voted down a UAW-endorsed contract by a staggering 96 percent. As at Lear, the UAW has refused to call a strike at Allison.

“It’s just time to stand up for what’s right”

Workers at Ford Chicago also voiced support for a joint fight, despite the efforts of the UAW bureaucracy to isolate Lear workers and keep workers at the Big Three in the dark about their struggle. “I hope Lear gets a better contract than the rest of us!” a Ford Chicago worker told the WSWS. Addressing herself to Lear workers, she said, “Keep fighting! We support you.”

Several Lear workers have also expressed indignation over the substantial portion of the signing bonus which would be taken by the UAW apparatus. Michael said, “Once the bargaining committee gets their cut of our ratification bonus and retro (after the rank and file pays the taxes for the money taken away from us) and split between committee members, they will be getting around \$20,000 apiece, tax free to them,” the worker continued. “That is their sneaky motive.”

Stephen, another veteran Lear worker, explained, “I’m voting no for the contract. I’m solely saying no due to the fact that they honestly can do better with our raises, instead of hiding it behind the bonus. \$6,000 is good, but I and others have put in a lot of time and years there and it’s not enough. And I’m upset about our union officials trying to scare people into taking it.”

Jonathan added, “Four years from now we’ll be making \$27.50 an hour. That’s some BS.

“I knew Shawn Fain was a fraud when he didn’t shut all of it down. I saw right through him, because he allowed the companies to still make money while workers were striking and only making \$500 a week. The companies were still making millions of dollars.

“Shawn Fain got on TV, and he would just talk, talk, talk. I was so angry because he was just sitting there blatantly lying. A strong president would have shut it *all* down. They wouldn’t have let anything move, and the workers would have got what they wanted. He didn’t do that.”

In a *Detroit News* interview last week, Fain had claimed there

was a “new day in the UAW,” stating, “We didn’t go out and browbeat people. We didn’t twist arms. We didn’t call up the leaderships and say get in the plant and beat up your membership and threaten them and tell them we’re going to close the plant and all those things that have happened in the past.”

Replying to this claim, Jonathan said, “Yes they did! When we had one of our meetings, the UAW guy stood up and that was one of the first things out of his mouth, that the company would close the plant if we voted no. I feel like we’re more with more fight more with the union than we are the company.

“We have not had any, *any*, talk about a strike. The local president, Fausto [Rodriguez], said he didn’t want to strike. Clear, right out of his mouth.

“And in order to get this contract to pass, they waited to the holidays when people are desperate. Desperate enough to say yes to unfair contracts.

“They don’t care about us. They’re not for the people, they are for themselves. Because if they were for the people, the people would make the choices. I don’t think a person who sits on their hands all day should have any say in what I make, how I make it and when I make it. We Lear Hammond workers are being used as a pawn. Each and every one of us in the UAW are being used as pawns. The UAW is aware of it. They stand with the companies. They don’t care about us, they only care about the money.”

Urging his fellow workers to vote “no” despite the difficulties, he explained, “A lot of times you are going through a financial burden and something may look good at the moment. But you have to look at the bigger picture down the line. Sacrifice always comes with a win. Even if it’s not a monetary win, you find out just how strong you really are. It’s just time to stand up for what’s right.”



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