

UAW rams through fourth sellout agreement at Indiana Lear seating plant

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The United Auto Workers announced that a fourth tentative agreement at Lear Corporation's Hammond, Indiana plant was ratified by 57 percent to 43 percent on Friday. In contrast to previous contract votes this year, UAW Local 2335 has not released ballot totals.

Lear workers who spoke with the WSWS following the vote were indignant over the coercive methods they said the UAW apparatus used to pass the contract. Significantly, a number of workers stated that local UAW officials had threatened workers' jobs, and they decried the fact that the vote was held in the plant, where management could observe.

"The day before the vote one of the supervisors told his people to vote 'yes' because if not there is a seating company ready to replace Lear if we vote no," Jonathan, a veteran Lear worker, stated (all names have been changed at workers' request to protect them from retaliation). "And Fausto (Rodriguez), the local president, was also walking around saying if we outbid ourselves we are going to lose our jobs."

"To say the least, I'm disgusted," said Ashley. "Having this done on company property was shameful and our shady union allowed it to happen. Now we have four years to deal with the consequences."

Several also pointed to the fact that the vote was held shortly before the holidays, when workers face additional financial pressures.

"It was all strategic and plotted," said Stephen, a veteran Lear worker. "They did this a few years ago. And now, it's the same BS again. They waited until it got cold, around the holiday season and when people were hurting from being laid-off to throw this at us. It's so typical of Lear and our Local 2335 union officials."

The UAW's "fourth" tentative agreement at Lear was virtually unchanged from the previous three, with the exception of an increased ratification bonus. Under the contract, workers will see the top pay rate increase from

\$24.44 an hour currently to \$27.50 an hour in 2026, with no cost-of-living raises. The wage increases will be further nullified by sharp increases in healthcare premiums, deductibles and co-pays. The contract also did not include supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB pay) or pensions, which were central demands of workers.

"I didn't like the contract at all, because at the end our insurance is going to go up," Stephen said, "and that's ridiculous. Inflation is still going to go up, and we'll be at \$27 an hour at the end of our contract. That's not enough. Quite a bit of us are paycheck to paycheck, feeding our families and taking care of bills."

The strong-arm methods by the UAW at Lear fly in the face of the hypocritical claims by UAW President Shawn Fain to have ended such practices under his administration. "This is a new day in the UAW," Fain said in a recent interview with the *Detroit News*. "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."

The contract's passage in fact followed a months-long effort by the UAW to wear down workers' opposition at Lear and block a strike.

In a remarkable show of determination, Lear workers had defied three earlier attempts by the UAW to push through a pro-company agreement. Workers initially voted down the UAW's first pro-company deal by a near-unanimous 95 percent on August 6, and rejected the next two by overwhelming three-to-one margins of 75 and 72 percent respectively in September.

The UAW's contract with Lear at Hammond expired on August 11, however the union bureaucracy kept workers on the job for months, blatantly ignoring a 94 percent strike vote by workers on August 15.

In October, the UAW called a strike at the Ford Chicago

assembly plant (which Lear supplies), part of Fain's fraudulent and limited "stand up strikes," which kept the vast majority of Big Three autoworkers on the job. Lear workers were laid off during the strike at Ford Chicago, and despite having voted to strike, were forced to subsist on state unemployment, which is capped at just \$390 a week in Indiana.

"It was pulling teeth just to get unemployment," Ashley said. "With the layoffs before then and then that layoff, it's just so hard catching back up. It was virtually impossible."

Throughout, the UAW maintained a complete information blackout on the struggle at Lear and workers repeated "no" votes on its deals with the company.

The UAW's pro-corporate operation at Lear was part of its across-the-board efforts to impose the demands of the auto companies and prevent a full-scale revolt across the auto industry. Contrary to Fain's claims to be enacting a "new day" in the UAW, the union bureaucracy has continued to betray one struggle after another under his administration, including at the Big Three, Mack Trucks, Clarios, Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Detroit casinos.

While the UAW, the media, and the Biden administration have sought to present the Big Three contracts as "historic," the reality is far different. The deals fell far short of workers' demands for a 46 percent wage increase, COLA fully tied to inflation, pensions and retiree health care. Since then, GM has announced it is implementing a \$10 billion stock buyback program, its largest ever, and raising investor dividends 30 percent, completely refuting Fain's declaration that the UAW had "squeezed every penny" from the companies.

Most damningly, the automakers have already begun to implement a brutal layoff and cost-cutting program in the wake of the contracts, as the Autoworker Rank-and-File Committee Network had warned. Stellantis announced last week that it would be laying off up to 3,600 workers at its Toledo Jeep Complex and Detroit Assembly Complex Mack plant.

But resistance is growing to the UAW's pro-corporate policies. The latest rebellion has emerged at Allison Transmission, a major automotive and military supplier in Indianapolis, where workers voted down a UAW-endorsed contract by a massive 96 percent.

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Workers at Lear said they had lost whatever hopes they had had in Fain in the course of the past few months.

Ashley, speaking to the WSWS before the vote results were announced, asked angrily, "I want to know where Shawn Fain is? I want to know how come they are not allowing us to go on our strike to fight for what we want? We turned the contract down three times. Where are you now? How come we can't get in touch with you? How come you're not calling us back? I want to know why you're not giving us permission to go on strike."

Stephen noted, "To be honest with you, I had a little hope in Shawn Fain, until I started to really dig down and we tried to contact him, and he just completely ignored all of it. And I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels that way.

Ashley added, "I can't even describe the disappointment we all feel when it comes down to this union, and how they're treating us at the parts suppliers. Like we don't matter. Like, 'you guys are nothing, you do what we say, you get what we give you, and keep your mouth closed.' And that's it. And I'm sick of it."

Workers are increasingly turning to alternative organizations, rank-and-file committees, in their struggle to overcome the UAW bureaucracy's treachery. Lear workers should join and build the growing network of autoworker rank-and-file committees, in order to prepare for the next stage of their fight to win their interests.

"The workers can take control," Ashley said, "because if the UAW themselves are not going to stand behind us, we need to stand up for ourselves. We got to fight for ourselves, and we got to unite."



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