

“Vote no and stay strong”

UAW shuts down Lear Wentzville strike in Missouri, seeks to push through sellout agreement

Marcus Day
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Work at Lear? We want to hear from you. Fill out the form at the end to share your reaction to the tentative agreement. Your identity will be kept confidential.

The United Auto Workers union shut down a strike by nearly 500 Lear Corporation auto parts workers in Wentzville, Missouri, late Wednesday night, announcing it had reached a tentative agreement with the company. The three-day walkout at the St. Louis-area factory had quickly led to production stoppages at the nearby General Motors Wentzville Assembly plant.

Workers should reject the contract on principle. The UAW’s shutdown of the strike before workers had voted on or even seen the full contract is standard operating procedure, including under the “reform” administration of union President Shawn Fain. The UAW bureaucracy’s anti-democratic move—overturning the old labor principle of “no contract, no work”—is aimed at softening the impact of the strike on the corporations and making passage of the contract appear like a foregone conclusion.

In the same way, the UAW apparatus forced Big Three autoworkers back to work last year before giving them the details of what turned out to be a massive sellout deal which has led to thousands of job cuts. Commenting on the UAW’s Facebook announcement of the tentative agreement at Lear, a GM worker posed the question, “Why is the new norm going back without signing?”

In what was likely a coordinated move, the UAW also announced a tentative agreement on Wednesday at the Forvia (formerly known as Faurecia) factory in Blue Springs, Missouri, which supplies the Ford Kansas City Assembly complex. No details of that deal have yet been released, but workers there have grown increasingly frustrated after being kept on the job without a contract for nearly a month, despite a unanimous strike vote.

As of this writing, the union has released limited and self-serving contract “highlights” to workers but has yet to announce when it will be holding ratification votes or distributing the full contract language. After stating that 60 contractual issues remain unresolved earlier in the week, on Thursday Local 282 President Bill Hugeback claimed the new deal contained “significant economic gains.” Describing the UAW’s intentions for the

ratification process, he said, “We’ll let them [Lear workers] read it for a couple days and meet on it and then vote.”

Workers should demand the immediate release of the full contract, its distribution to every member, and a week to carefully study and discuss its details. Any effort by the UAW bureaucracy to rush workers into accepting the agreement without all the facts should be adamantly rejected.

Even based on the UAW’s limited “highlights”—which workers have shared with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*—it is clear that the deal falls short of what workers had been striking to achieve, leaving little doubt that it is the latest in a long line of UAW sellout contracts.

- The agreement would raise the current top wage from \$24 to \$28 upon ratification, eventually rising to \$32.41 in 2027. This raise is well below the immediate increase to over \$30 an hour many Lear workers have been demanding at a minimum and fails to make up for years of high inflation and earlier wage concessions.

- New hires would also make only 80 percent of the top wage, taking three years to reach the maximum rate, in a continuation of the widely hated “tier” system, which the UAW has allowed to proliferate throughout the auto industry.

- The “highlights” state that Lear agreed to restore an annual cost-of-living allowance (COLA)—previously given up by the UAW—but do not explain what the exact formula or estimated increase to workers’ base wages annually would be. At companies such as John Deere and the Big Three automakers, workers have come to learn that COLA formulas recently agreed to by the UAW have amounted to only a small portion of the overall increase in consumer prices.

The contract summary has already provoked widespread opposition among Lear workers. Beyond wages, workers have objected to the continuation of the punitive “points” attendance system. Others expect that the contract will do nothing to address routine six-day workweeks, grueling overtime, dangerous conditions and frequent repetitive stress injuries.

In a sign of the anger over the deal, a worker shared with the WSWS a photo showing a hand-drawn sign stating, “VOTE NO if

you want to eat.”

Making clear that the company is satisfied with the contract, a Lear spokesman told the *Detroit Free Press* Thursday, “We are pleased to have reached a tentative agreement with the UAW at our Wentzville facility. We are focused on resuming normal operations.”

Lear’s second-quarter earnings report: Record sales, more job reductions

Opposition to the UAW deal has been fueled by the fact that the company’s penny-pinching with workers is financing tens of millions, which are being lavished on executives and large shareholders.

On Thursday Lear announced record sales of \$6 billion for the second quarter this year, with \$173 million in net income. The company substantially outperformed financial analysts’ earnings estimates.

In a Thursday conference call with Wall Street firms, Chief Financial Officer Jason Cardew (2023 compensation: \$6.5 million) boasted that Lear had given \$104 million to investors over the previous three months, via \$60 million in share repurchases and \$44 million in dividends.

Lear executives gave a number of clear signals to their financial backers that they intend to further boost profits and “share value” at the expense of workers’ jobs in the coming months.

Most significantly, Cardew revealed that the company was proceeding with substantial job reductions, with plans to reduce “headcount” by 8 percent in its seating business and 6 percent in its electrical systems segment by the end of the year. Cardew said more than half the reductions had already been carried out but did not reveal where they were taking place. At the end of 2023, Lear employed 186,000 on six continents, with approximately 88,000 of those either unionized or covered by labor contracts, according to the company’s 2023 annual report.

The attacks at Lear are part of a wider assault on workers’ jobs throughout the auto industry internationally. The automakers have rapidly accelerated their cuts following the UAW’s imposition of the 2023 Big Three contracts, which have allowed the companies to carry out thousands of layoffs and mass firings of temps.

During the conference call, CEO Ray Scott (whose 2023 compensation was \$18.9 million) also reported that Lear had completed the purchase of WIP Industrial Automation, stating the acquisition “will allow us to really accelerate the labor cost reduction and manufacturing cost reduction over the next several years.”

The corporations have increasingly turned to automation and technological advances in artificial intelligence in recent years, seeking to weaponize them against a working class increasingly pressing for higher wages and better working conditions. Package carrier UPS has also carried out a jobs bloodbath this year through the expansion of automated shipping hubs.

Vote NO on the contract! Form rank-and-file committees to take control of the fight for higher wages!

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges the largest possible rejection of the UAW’s pro-company agreement. Lear, as well as the major automakers it supplies, has more than enough money to provide workers with far higher wages, along with vastly improved and safe working conditions.

Time and again, the UAW apparatus has agreed to contracts which leave workers increasingly unable to keep up with the cost of living. Contrary to the claims of UAW President Shawn Fain to be carrying out “reforms” in the union and implementing “transparency,” workers continue to be kept in the dark on contract negotiations, while a court-appointed monitor has stated it has opened new investigations into corruption in the UAW’s top leadership, citing a “culture of fear of retaliation.”

To ensure their fight is placed on the strongest possible footing, Lear workers should form rank-and-file committees, led by the most militant and class-conscious workers. Such committees would provide a means to unite around demands necessary to meet workers’ needs—such as a 50 percent wage increase—and to coordinate a struggle across different plants and companies.

If they defy the UAW bureaucracy’s efforts to push through a sellout, Lear Wentzville workers will find they have powerful allies among workers at GM, Ford, Forvia and elsewhere.

Addressing herself to Wentzville workers, a veteran Lear worker in Hammond, Indiana—where workers have repeatedly rebelled against UAW sellout contracts in recent years—told the *WSWS*, “Vote no and stay strong. We stand with them. Remember UAW International reps’ faces, so when it’s election time, they got to go. They are not for the people.”



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