

Opposition grows to UAW sellout at Rolls-Royce Indianapolis defense plant

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Join the fight for rank-and-file power. Rolls-Royce workers, fill out the form at the end of this article for information on how to build a rank-and-file committee to oppose the sellout contract.

Rank-and-file opposition is growing over the last-minute agreement reached by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy and Rolls-Royce to prevent a strike by 800 aircraft engine workers in Indianapolis, Indiana.

UAW President Shawn Fain announced the deal right before the midnight deadline on February 26. Two weeks before, workers at the plant voted by 99.5 percent to strike the major defense contractor, which manufactures engines for the B-52 bomber, CV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft and C-130J transport planes at the Indianapolis plant.

In a livestream announcement, Fain claimed the new five-year agreement eliminates wage tiers, includes double-digit wage increases, profit sharing “that the company cannot manipulate arbitrarily, improved retirement benefits and Cost-of-Living Adjustment.”

Even as Fain was making claims about another “historic” and “life-changing” agreement, rank-and-file UAW members at the Big Three auto companies and other corporations were pouring cold water over Fain’s rhetoric.

One worker wrote:

Make certain that the Union allows the members [to see] all the information of the contract not just the highlighter. At Stellantis the Union negotiated to close 19 facilities prior to ratification and never told us in the highlighter. Our facility ended up being closed. Fain is a smooth talker and it all sounds good. But like Satan it may take you down a bad path. Don’t trust everything he has to say.

Another Big Three autoworker commented, “Read the fine print of whatever Fain presents because somewhere in there he’s screwing you.” A third wrote, “We didn’t get hazard pay for working during Covid, now we’re getting low balled with profit sharing checks.”

Another worker sarcastically added, “Good luck on a great contract. Since Rolls-Royce [was] part of BMW group and I work for BMW RDC and we got ripped off and the union didn’t help win a good contract again.”

Other UAW workers took to social media to post warnings to their Rolls-Royce coworkers. “Layoffs coming soon,” one worker said. “Never fails after the UAW is in the picture.” Another worker referring to the closure of the GM Guide Lamp plant, the site of the 1936 sitdown strike in Indiana, said, “Union members never forget what they did to GM in Anderson.”

It is not clear the UAW bureaucracy even had a full, written contract in hand before calling off the strike. A February 28 message posted on the UAW Local 933 RR Unit website page suspiciously declared:

The Bargaining Committee will now be preparing an extensive contract summary with all pertinent details. This is being worked on now and sent to Detroit Solidarity House when completed. The plan is to have printed materials that will be ready to pass out by mid next week. Please be patient with your representatives as they have not been totally briefed on **all aspects** of the agreement to date. [Emphasis included.]

“The plan is to get the details in your hands as quick as possible while we update our team,” the statement continues, “and prepare for Information sessions all day Wednesday March 12, 2025 at the UAW Local 933 Union Hall.”

So the first opportunity for the membership to collectively challenge UAW officials on the terms of the deal will not take place until two weeks after the supposed deal was reached. To add insult to injury, voting will take place on the very same day—leaving workers with no time to discuss the details amongst themselves and campaign for a “no” vote. In fact, voting will begin at 5:30 a.m. on March 12, almost two hours before the first “informational meeting” is set to start at 7:15 a.m.

Although there will be a regular membership meeting on

Sunday, March 9, “The Shop Committee asks that we not turn the Union meeting into an information session out of consideration of the other units but will absolutely be available before and after the meeting to help.” This absurd statement is signed by John Snow, Chairman Bargaining Committee, Local 933 UAW/Rolls-Royce and Shop Committee members Matt Barton, John Sandlin, Bobby Jobe and Jerry Erisman.

There is no doubt that the local officials are functioning as the local stooges for Fain and the rest of the Solidarity House bureaucrats. Fain—who has repeatedly declared his willingness to work with the Trump administration, particularly to its trade war measures that pit American workers against their brothers in Canada, Mexico, China and other countries—has no intention of calling a strike at a major supplier of US imperialism’s war machine.

On the contrary, Fain has repeatedly praised the World War II relations between the UAW bureaucracy and the Roosevelt administration under the so-called “Arsenal of Democracy,” which included a ban on strikes by workers fighting wartime inflation and speedup.

Rolls-Royce workers must reject the efforts by the UAW bureaucracy to ram through another sellout deal, which would dictate the terms of their lives until 2030—as Trump’s tariffs and corporate tax cuts lead to an explosion of inflation and layoffs. They should follow the lead of workers at Volvo Trucks, Clarios, Detroit Three automakers, Dakkota, Dana, Allison Transmission and other UAW plants who organized rank-and-file committees to empower shop floor workers to override the betrayals of the UAW apparatus and fight for their needs.

Workers must demand the immediate release of the full contract and sufficient time to discuss it before any ratification vote. At the same time, a rank-and-file committee must oversee the integrity of the vote and ballot counting and prevent any swindling by the UAW bureaucracy.

In his livestream announcement, Fain referred to the “victories” at Allison Transmission and the Big Three “stand up” strike and falsely claimed that tiers had been abolished. The Big Three contracts reduce but do not eliminate the wage progression for Tier 2 workers. New workers earn just 70 percent of the standard base pay rate. After one year, pay will rise to just 75 percent of standard base pay, and 85 percent after two years. Second tier workers also do not have fully paid pensions, only 401(k)s.

Fain claims tier four Rolls-Royce workers would get an \$18.79 raise over the life of the contract, with second tier brought up to \$46.37 per hour. But as workers know from previous contracts, whatever management gives with one hand it takes with another. Details of concessions are generally buried in the fine print of memoranda of understanding.

Continuing his pitch, Fain boasted that the profit-sharing formula would be the same as at the Big Three. Last week, workers erupted in anger over the Stellantis announcement that

profit-sharing checks would drop by 73 percent from \$13,860 last year to \$3,780 this year. At the same time, former CEO Carlos Tavares was paid a \$24 million salary, plus a \$2.08 million severance and \$10.4 million bonus.

In fact, profit-sharing was a scheme introduced by the UAW bureaucracy in the 1980s as part of its corporatist program of labor-management “partnership.” It is based on the lie that workers have the same interests as the corporate bosses. While promising workers rewards for boosting corporate profits and cutting labor costs, it has been used a means to increase the exploitation of workers, leading to more layoffs, speedup, injuries and death.

In a real measure of who will benefit from this sellout, right after the deal was announced, Rolls-Royce’s stock price jumped by almost 2.5 points. Financial analysts described the company’s shares as “the gift that keeps giving.”

Rolls-Royce’s operating profits jumped £2.9 billion (\$3.7 billion) in 2024. With the US-backed Israeli war against the Palestinians expanding into a Middle East war against Iran, the blowup between Trump and Zelensky exacerbating tensions between the US and Europe, while the conflict against Russia and China continues, defense contractors like Rolls-Royce are warming their hands over anticipated profits. All of this will be paid for with the lives and living standards of the working class, including defense workers.

Rolls-Royce workers, take a stand now! Build a rank-and-file committee to take the conduct of this struggle into your own hands. Demand the full contract and organize rank-and-file discussions to campaign for the widest possible “no” vote and prepare for strike action.

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