

UAW Rolls-Royce sellout passes with substantial opposition from rank and file

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Last Wednesday, a five-year contract between Rolls-Royce and the United Auto Workers (UAW) was ratified by 489 votes in favor and 205 votes against. The contract, drawn up by the UAW bureaucracy and union president Shawn Fain, never aimed to address the demands raised by workers.

The UAW announced a last-minute deal on February 26 to prevent a strike at the Indianapolis, Indiana plant, which had been authorized by workers by 99.5 percent. The factory produces engines for US military aircraft and vehicles.

Although 70 percent of workers ostensibly voted “yes,” more than 100 workers did not cast ballots, expressing alienation from the UAW bureaucracy.

When he announced the “historic” contract in a livestream, surrounded by UAW Local 933 officials, Fain claimed workers would receive highlights. Only under pressure from workers to see the full deal was the 20-page highlights and White Book distributed to workers prior to the March 12 vote.

After the vote, a legacy worker quipped to the WSWS: “Yeah, it’s always ‘fun’ to see what we really got in the months and years afterward. ... I’m super disappointed that we didn’t fix all the issues for the younger people and those who come after us.”

While Fain gave his now standard claim that the contract was “historic,” the contract did not eliminate tiers, offer equal wage increases, implement cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), or increase healthcare and retirement benefits or job security.

Instead, the agreement claimed that tier workers would receive top pay by the end of the contract, with gradual increases for new hires over three years (equal to 70, 80 and 90 percent of the legacy rate). Tier 4 workers would not reach full wages, as Fain and the highlights claimed. COLA was limited to some workers, but not across the board. This included a five cent deduction from COLA at the end of the agreement to set a base for future COLA calculations.

“John Snow [UAW Local 933 Rolls-Royce chairman] tried to sell the contract to us over and over,” one worker

told the WSWS before the vote. “I didn’t feel like legacy workers got anything out of this contract at all. Most of those guys will be gone before they ever even see the benefit of a wage increase, and then I’d be stuck with all these other guys to deal with.”

Another worker said, “Seems to me all he is worried about is keeping his \$300,000 a year chairman position at the next election.”

The vote on the contract did not accurately represent the support for the deal. Instead, it reflected the role of the bureaucracy in suppressing strikes. Just days before the vote, Shawn Fain was alongside Bernie Sanders, denouncing billionaires and “unchecked corporate greed.” But the next day, Fain praised Trump’s “America First” trade war policies, falsely presenting the fascist president’s tariff policies as benefiting American workers.

The UAW has emerged as a major factor in helping impose “labor peace” in the aerospace and defense industries. Just four months ago, Eaton Aerospace workers in Jackson, Michigan, were browbeaten into accepting an identical deal in which tiers were not eliminated. These workers had rejected the company’s “last, best, and final offer” a month earlier and courageously struck for three months.

At the same time, 33,000 Boeing workers were waging a struggle against the company as well as the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy.

In a related development, ATI steelworkers have recently rejected a United Steelworkers sellout contract after being forced to continue working under an expired agreement. ATI makes specialty metals for aerospace and military industries. A strike could cause a shortage of metals for jet engines, helicopter blades and medical supplies.

The timing is significant. ATI has a direct Long-Term Purchase Agreement with Rolls-Royce, established in 2019. ATI supplies rotating-disc-quality nickel-base and other alloys directly to the Indianapolis campus of Rolls-Royce’s plants.

Like Eaton and Boeing, Rolls-Royce is a major military

supplier. The US Department of Defense (DoD) awarded Rolls-Royce in Indianapolis \$695.3 million to “support program management, integrated logistics support, sustaining engineering, maintenance and repair, reliability improvements, configuration management, and site support for the MV-22, CV-22, and CMV-22 AE1107C engine series.”

On February 7, the plant was awarded a \$167.3 million firm fixed-price contract for the production of 40 MT7 turboshaft engines, ancillary parts, installation kits, and a portable test tool inspection in support of the Ship to Shore Connector Program and Landing Craft, Air Cushion (LCAC) 100 Class craft. The Pentagon contract is for the production of dozens of engines for US Navy landing crafts. The Indianapolis plant also produces engines for aircraft like the B-52 bomber, CV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, and C-130J transport planes.

UAW backs “America First” militarism against the working class

Trump’s claim that his trade war measures would benefit workers, the logic of which leads to massive new wars, has proven false. In the second month of Trump 2.0, the US launched airstrikes on Yemen, murdering dozens of civilians. These strikes were justified as a preemptive action against Houthi rebels blocking food and water supplies for Gaza. With the support of the Israeli state, the US is attempting to continue the genocide of the Gaza population and expand the broader war in the Middle East.

On Friday, GE Aerospace and the US Air Force announced a contract on Friday valued at \$5 billion for an indefinite quantity of F110-GE-129 engines for F-15 and F-16 fighter jets. Pratt & Whitney, a Connecticut defense contractor, is in negotiations with the IAM for a contract that expires May 5. This is crucial, as Pratt & Whitney has secured \$1.5 billion for F-22 fighter jets.

The DoD’s proposed budget for this year is \$850 billion. But while military spending has increased, jobs and pay continue to stagnate and decline.

As Fain and other union bureaucrats give mealy-mouthed defenses of workers’ jobs and democratic rights, thousands of jobs are on the chopping block. By stating his support for Trump’s trade war policies and preparations for war against Europe and China, Fain is currying favor with the military-industrial complex to avoid disruptions to military production. This is a continuation of his role under Biden, when he trumpeted the example of UAW members in

working under a no-strike pledge during World War II, while Biden called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO.”

Support for war abroad is connected with support for dictatorship in the factories and workplaces. The UAW has done nothing to defend one of its former members, Mahmoud Khalil, who was arrested and faces deportation for expressing his democratic right to protest the genocide in Gaza while a student at Columbia University. The UAW is also complicit in the police raids that began in the Ford plants almost 80 years after the massive spy ring aimed at beating and arresting militant union and socialist workers.

The fight at Rolls-Royce, Allison, the Big Three, and many other plants is not over. The passage of the contract is not a defeat for Rolls-Royce workers but rather a betrayal by the UAW bureaucracy, which confined workers to a snap contract.

Workers must develop the Rolls-Royce Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight against the attacks being prepared by the UAW and their handlers in both parties. Workers must take warning from their brothers and sisters in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

In May, following the Big Three autoworkers’ contract, the Stellantis Kokomo Rank-and-File Committee was founded in opposition to UAW betrayals and to the threat of war. They exposed Fain’s lies that workers were fired or “laid off” due to low performance. In fact, the layoffs were a cost-cutting mechanism agreed to by the UAW. Their demands included ending mass firings, bringing back fired workers and abolishing tiers and temporary positions.



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