

UAW hails sellout agreement at Tennessee Volkswagen plant as “historic”

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The United Auto Workers announced a sellout tentative agreement last week for about 3,000 workers at the newly unionized Volkswagen Chattanooga, Tennessee factory after more than 500 days of negotiations. While releasing few concrete details, the UAW predictably called the deal historic.

In fact, the 20 percent across-the-board pay raise touted by the UAW is the same miserable offer made by the company last October in its take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum issued to workers. At that time, the UAW leadership deemed this very same wage proposal “inadequate” and held a much publicized strike vote that was ratified by over two-thirds of the membership. However, no strike deadline was issued and no strike ever took place.

In typical fashion, the UAW has only released vaguely worded and cherry picked highlights of the rest of the tentative contract.

The deal take place in the midst of a continuing bloodbath in the auto industry, and a wider crisis of job losses in the US and internationally hitting broad sections of the working class. The UAW is claiming the new TA contains “real” job security, but none of the many recent UAW contracts have been able to slow down the closure of plants, elimination of shifts, layoffs and firings. In March 2025, the Chattanooga facility cut one of its three shifts, eliminating jobs and increasing the pressure on the remaining shifts through speed-up and overwork.

At the same time, Stellantis has further extended its reopen date for the shuttered Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant to June 2028, past the May 2028 Big Three contract deadline. The UAW had claimed in 2023 that it “won” a commitment to reopen Belvidere in 2025.

In December 2024, Volkswagen announced plans to

eliminate a third of its German workforce with 35,000 jobs cuts announced just before Christmas. German VW subsidiaries Porsche, Audi, Autovision, and Cariad have recently announced 13,500 job cuts in total. This is part of a larger restructuring of the auto industry worldwide, which is imposing drastic cost-cutting measures on the backs of workers. Under these conditions the UAW bureaucracy’s promise of “real” job security cannot be taken seriously.

At no point has the UAW offered solidarity with German VW workers or called for a joint fight to defend jobs and living standards.

On the UAW Facebook page workers expressed their anger at the UAW for failing to protect jobs. “And now VW is going to cut a third of its workforce come March” read one comment. “Lets see how long before they close the plant.”

Referring to the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs by Amazon and United Parcel Service, two comments on a Facebook post of a recent *Jacobin* magazine article praising the VW deal said, “Ask UPS if you need clarity.” *Jacobin*, the semi-official organ of the Democratic Socialists of America, praised the TA as a breakthrough for unions in the south. UAW President Shawn Fain has relied on the DSA—including in his inner circle of advisers and propagandists—to provide a left cover for the UAW bureaucracy’s betrayals.

VW workers should demand that the UAW immediately release the full tentative agreement. If the self-serving “highlights” are any indication, the whole contract has the stench of a humiliating surrender. The highlights claim to make healthcare more affordable for workers. What are the details? VW workers should have as much time as possible to study the contract before a ratification vote is held.

Workers cannot rely on the corporatist UAW bureaucracy to protect jobs and ensure fair contracts. For the last half century, living conditions and real wages that were won in struggles fought by workers in the auto industry and other industries have been bargained away by the union apparatus in exchange for positions on corporate boards, company shares and an endless flow of company money into “joint programs.”

After the bogus “stand up strike” of 2023, Fain & Co. signed a deal with the Big Three that has paved the way for the destruction of thousands of jobs at GM, Ford and Stellantis. In the beginning of the year, GM eliminated a shift and wiped out 1,100 jobs at its flagship EV plant, Factory Zero, a few miles from the UAW national headquarters in Detroit. UAW officials did not lift a finger to oppose the job cuts or thousands of others at EV battery plants in Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee.

At the same time, Fain has been one of the biggest backers of Trump’s tariffs and trade war measures, peddling the lie that the destruction of the jobs of tens of thousands of workers in Canada and Mexico is a boon for American workers. In fact, this only drives a wedge between workers and undermines a common fight against the transnational auto companies.

There is no indication that the UAW sought to align the VW contract expiration with the Big Three auto companies, whose contracts expire in May 2028. This isolates the Chattanooga workers from their brothers and sisters in Detroit and elsewhere, weakening the position of workers in Tennessee and at the Detroit-based carmakers.

To wage a real fight for living wages, safe working conditions, retirement and affordable healthcare, workers need to form and build rank-and-file committees connected across national borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The aim of these committees is to transfer power and decision making from the union apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.



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