

Text of tentative agreement exposes UAW bureaucracy's effort to betray American Axle strikers

Kevin Reed
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Striking American Axle workers in Three Rivers, Michigan are being rushed into approving the sellout tentative contract that was agreed to by the UAW bureaucracy and management on Wednesday evening. On Friday, workers reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that they had been given access to the entire 118-page tentative agreement (TA) and are being expected to review it, attend meetings on Saturday to ask questions and then vote on the four-year agreement on Sunday.

There is an obvious reason why the UAW leadership wants the American Axle strike wrapped up by Sunday night. The UAW Convention opens in Detroit on Monday morning. UAW President Shawn Fain and his regional directors are planning to walk into the convention hall and hail the great “victory” at American Axle. In doing so, the UAW apparatus is attempting to use the workers in Three Rivers as props in a fraudulent public relations campaign.

The UAW PR campaign is also part of the bureaucracy's desperate effort to contain a growing rebellion of auto parts workers, including at Nexteer Automotive, Dana and Bridgewater Interiors. Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan have voted down three sellout contracts that will keep top wages at just \$27 an hour by 2030 while Fain and the UAW apparatus have defied the workers' 86 percent strike mandate and demanded they surrender. Dana workers in Ft. Wayne, Indiana; Toledo, Ohio; Columbia, Missouri; and Warren, Michigan have overwhelmingly defeated UAW and United Steelworkers-backed contracts.

One hundred and eighteen pages is not a short document, and it cannot be meaningfully absorbed, debated and voted upon within 48 hours by workers who have been on a picket line for almost two weeks. The TA document is a complex assemblage of individually negotiated articles with different dates, different version numbers and struck-through text alongside replacement text.

This means workers must not only read it but interpret its difficult formatting to understand what has been agreed to. Releasing it on Friday for a Sunday vote is an abuse of the democratic rights of workers that has become the stock-in-trade of the UAW bureaucracy and throughout the entire corporatist union “movement.”

On Wednesday, UAW Local 2093 Bargaining Chair Josh Jager said that workers have “reacted positively” to the agreement and are “eager to review the full details.” This is under conditions where Fain, Region 1D Director Steve Dawes and Jager have been calling the contract “one for the history books,” and a “win” for the workers. The UAW officials have promoted what they call the deal's “highlights” and used them to bulldoze workers into voting for it without the time

necessary to understand it fully.

An American Axle worker pointed to some of the reasons the contract should be rejected:

There's issues with the compounded breaks and overtime. They're using this for critical and just in time production. Since they supply assembly directly, they're always put on critical. The pay is the obvious major issue, but the UAW is enforcing the increasing rate of exploitation.

The worker also said, “They can call break time when the line goes down, but if it takes longer than the break time, then they can call yet another break, back-to-back. Then you have to work twice as long without a break.” The worker added, “You can absolutely tell where they are trying to hide the lies in the language, where the wording gets overly complicated.”

The UAW bureaucracy's repeated central public claim, which has been amplified in corporate media coverage, is that workers will be making \$30 per hour by 2030. However, for some workers, especially those described in the contract as “legacy” production associates—workers hired before May 23, 2008, when their wages were cut in half from \$29 to \$14.50 per hour—the wage increases top out upon ratification at \$30. After that, rather than receiving ongoing hourly wage increases in years two, three and four, the legacy workers receive lump sum payments.

This is a betrayal of these workers who, if their wages had kept pace with inflation over the past 18 years, would be earning \$45 per hour now and \$50 per hour by 2030. The three years of one-time payments are a substitute for real wage growth because lump sums do not compound. Additionally, the lump sum payments are not the basis for overtime calculations, shift premium calculations, vacation pay or retirement contributions.

As the contract explicitly states, lump sum payments “are not eligible for company contributions to the ARC or 401K.” Workers who understand the difference between a wage increase and a cash payment know that these are not equivalent, while the union officials and the company are seeking to use the lump sums as a selling point to push through approval of the contract.

The contract includes a provision called “Temporary Emergency Inflation Relief,” using language that sounds like protection against cost-of-living erosion. However, this is not a genuine cost of living

adjustment (COLA).

The clause is permanently dormant unless and until year-over-year consumer price index (CPI-W) inflation exceeds 7.5 percent. At that threshold—which was last reached during the peak of pandemic-era inflation in 2022—workers would receive a one-time lump sum payment equal to only 2 percent of their base hourly rate multiplied by their regular-time hours for that quarter.

If inflation runs at 4 percent, 5 percent or 6 percent—a likelihood under conditions of war against Iran and associated shipping blockade—the clause does not activate. There is no partial trigger or sliding scale. There is only a cliff at 7.5 percent inflation, and the compensation is a one-time payment, not a wage increase.

Meanwhile, the clause has another caveat. If the Bureau of Labor Statistics discontinues or significantly changes the CPI-W index—and federal statistical agencies are not immune from political interference—and the parties cannot agree within 60 days on a substitute index, the obligation of American Axle under this section is “permanently suspended for the remainder of the Agreement term.”

A striking worker also explained that the highlights being promoted by the UAW leadership say that there are three new paid holidays in the agreement, “but if you read further down, they took two holidays back. So, we actually only get one more day off.”

Local 2093’s Jager claimed on Wednesday, “Despite what the company pushed for, we would not accept any concessions from this agreement.” However, the language in the TA does not support this assertion.

The subcontracting language in Article 2 requires the company to give advance notice and discuss planned subcontracting with the union, and states that “subcontracting will not be used for the purpose of causing layoffs of bargaining unit associates.”

This is made to sound like protection, but the same section states that discussions between the union and company “will not result in a delay in implementing the Company’s subcontracting plans.” What does this mean? The union gets to talk, but management does what it wants by contracting out work over the any objection by workers, provided the company goes through the conversational motions first. This is clearly not the prohibition on subcontracting that the “no concessions” claim implies.

In the new Article 33, titled “Workplace Respect and Inclusion,” UAW officials have subordinated the workforce to the Trump administration’s anti-Diversity, Equity and Inclusion executive orders. The agreement states that any provision in the article that conflicts with those orders is automatically void. Workers should be aware that this article removes the very protections that its title implies.

Near the end of the 118-page document is a section listing individual grievance resolutions reached as part of the overall contract settlement. It includes a lengthy list of workers whose grievances are recorded as “withdrawn without prejudice”—meaning the union, as part of reaching this overall agreement, has dropped their individual complaints against the company.

Workers at Three Rivers—along with workers throughout the auto supply chain, from Nexteer to Dana and beyond—are facing a conspiracy of labor-management collusion as the industry is being reshaped by automation, artificial intelligence and military-oriented production shifts. The issues in the American Axle strike are the same throughout the industry.

As a young worker with five years at the Dana Driveline factory in Toledo, where the UAW contract was rejected by 95 percent, told the

WSWS:

The contract did not have enough. There was no profit-sharing, no cost-of-living and it’s only raised starting pay to \$22.50. I’m making \$20 now and just had a child. I can’t get by on that.

The UAW doesn’t care. They just wanted us to say yes and just keep working. But we just kept talking to each other, the workers, not the union, and we said vote no, this is trash. This was no better than the ones they brought back before.

I’m glad the other plants stood up too and said no. Dana is one of the greediest corporations and they want to get as rich as possible by paying us a little as possible.

American Axle workers must join their brothers and sisters at Nexteer and Dana and reject the TA that betrays their struggle. The *World Socialist Web Site* and its affiliated International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on auto workers to build independent rank-and-file committees in every plant and workplace—democratically controlled by workers themselves, not by highly-paid union officials whose interests are increasingly aligned with management and the corporations.

These committees are not a supplement to the existing union structure, but an alternative form of organization capable of coordinating struggle across plant boundaries, connecting workers at the parts suppliers with assembly workers, logistics workers and the broader working class in a unified fight against wage suppression, benefit cuts, automation-driven job elimination and the conversion of auto production capacity toward military ends under the Trump administration’s war-economy agenda.

Through rank-and-file committees, workers will have both the organizational independence and the democratic mandate to escalate action, refuse inadequate settlements and link the immediate demands of workers at a single plant to the broader political and economic questions that determine the conditions of working class life across the industry and beyond.



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