

# UAW officials rush through sellout contract at American Axle on eve of Detroit convention

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Late Sunday, union officials reported that striking workers at American Axle & Manufacturing in Three Rivers, Michigan had ratified the tentative contract agreement, which they had less than 48 hours to study and discuss. The vote brought an end to the strike by the 1,000 parts workers that began on June 1, and they returned to work on Monday morning.

In the face of a campaign by the UAW apparatus to falsely promote the contract as a major victory—combined with threats that workers would lose their jobs if they rejected it—union officials claimed the deal passed by 80 to 20 percent, with 704 workers voting to ratify it and 173 workers voting no. Given the campaign of intimidation, lies, and the rushed vote, the fact that one-fifth of the workers still opposed it is significant.

UAW President Shawn Fain claimed the union was “winning back a big chunk” of what had been taken away from American Axle workers in a series of union betrayals over the past 18 years. Since the tentative contract was announced, Fain has celebrated the “\$30 by 2030” as a significant breakthrough on wages. However, the center of this narrative is a fraud. In 2008, American Axle workers were making \$29 an hour (the equivalent of \$46.04 in today’s dollars) before the UAW agreed to cut their pay in half to supposedly save jobs.

The UAW bureaucracy kept the strike isolated and cut off from critical support building up among low-paid parts workers nationally. At Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan workers have rejected three sellout UAW contracts—which top out at \$27 an hour after four years, and forced a strike authorization vote, which Solidarity House has ignored. At Dana Incorporated, workers in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, Tennessee and other states have rejected UAW-backed deals by margins of 90 percent and higher. Here too, the UAW International has prevented a strike at the critical parts supplier.

A fool-proof way for workers to determine in whose interests the ratified contract serves is the official response of the management of American Axle, now known as Dauch Corp. Chris Son, Dauch’s vice president of marketing and communications, said in a statement to the Commercial-News Sunday night, “We are pleased that UAW Local 2093 at our Three Rivers Manufacturing Facility has ratified a new, four-year collective bargaining agreement.”

The UAW bureaucracy’s primary concern in advance of the strike was making sure that American Axle had enough parts in inventory to last for two weeks so that the major automotive assembly plants, including the GM Flint Assembly Plant, would not be disrupted by a shortage of parts. Additionally, the timing of the strike made it clear that the Fain leadership wanted it shut down just as the UAW convention was beginning in Detroit on Monday morning, so they could declare it a major “victory” in front of the assembled delegates.

In other words, for the UAW apparatus, the strike was a stage-managed public relations operation that avoided any disruption in the auto industry supply chain and then repackaged it as union theater for the Fain bureaucracy’s own political purposes.

The strike was also coordinated with the Michigan Democratic Party with Governor Gretchen Whitmer and leading Democratic candidates posturing as friends of the strikers on the picket line. This included US Congresswoman Haley Stevens, who voted in November 2022 for legislation requested by the Biden administration to block a nationwide railroad strike and impose a contract that railway workers had previously rejected.

On the picket lines in Three Rivers and on social media, workers expressed anger over the deal’s maintenance of separate treatment for “legacy” workers and those hired after the 2008 wage cuts. Many workers saw the bonus structure in years two, three and four as a new tier system

in disguise, because bonuses do not raise the hourly base and can be used to keep divisions in place.

Workers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed their opposition to the deal on multiple grounds. A worker on the picket line before it was shut down said that the lack of job security was the biggest issue. He said that job protections were not in the last contract, but they had been in contracts previously.

Workers also spoke about how the wage structure creates divisions. “There’s a bump in pay for new hires and there’s a bump for legacy workers, but in the middle, the workers there got shafted,” one worker said.

In a Facebook post, a worker spoke out against the agreement and called for a no vote. He wrote, “Very disappointed in my Local 2093 UAW for taking this as a ‘win’ and letting the local media go crazy with it. Very manipulative.”

Responding to someone who said he was undermining “solidarity,” the worker replied, “We were told twice that ‘legacy’ as a category would disappear, and it’s still here 18 years later. That’s a tier by definition: two groups doing the same job under different pay rules. ‘\$30 by 2030’ wasn’t the original demand, ‘no tiers’ and ‘no concessions’ were.

“We got the number but not the thing the number was supposed to represent. If \$30 immediately is affordable for 85ish legacy workers, it’s affordable for everyone who is currently topped out at \$22 too (hence the 5+ year remark). That’s not solidarity dying, that’s asking for the same solidarity to apply to everyone.”

Workers also reported to the WSWS that a major dispute broke out at one of the roll-out meetings between the local union reps and the workers opposed to the contract. Workers reported that UAW Local 2093 officials told threatened that status of the strike would change from an Unfair Labor Practices to an economic walkout if they rejected the contract and workers could be permanently replaced with strikebreakers.

Some workers also told the WSWS that there had been a very high rate of turnover at the Three Rivers facility and, although they were not in favor of the contract, were afraid to vote against it because of the threats made at the informational meetings.

These kinds of threats fit a pattern in previous UAW sellouts, where union officials act as conduits for management’s ultimatum. The message from the apparatus was not “fight for a better contract,” but “accept this deal or lose your job.”

This kind of coercion is the *modus operandi* of the

UAW bureaucracy, which proceeds in contract ratifications as thuggish representatives of the auto companies. The tentative agreement was announced late Wednesday, workers were not given details of the 118-page agreement on Friday, attended informational meetings on Saturday and voted on Sunday. The UAW bureaucrats, with their six-figure salaries, have nothing but contempt for the democratic rights of their members. They essentially told strikers who walked the picket lines for 10 days to “like or it or lump it.”

For workers who had expected the strike to lead to substantial changes in wages and benefits, the strike resulted in a bitter outcome. The anger American Axle workers feel connects them to the broader opposition throughout the parts sector, including at Nexteer, Dana, Bridgewater Interiors—where workers in Warren, Michigan also rejected a UAW-backed contract.

This underscores the necessity for American Axle workers to build rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW apparatus, to prepare a fight against the coming job cuts and oppose the terms of the pro-company contract.

The campaign to form such committees is central to the campaign of rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman who is running for UAW president based on a program of transferring power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor. In a statement on the opening of the UAW convention, Lehman pointed to the UAW bureaucracy’s efforts to strangle the struggles of workers at American Axle, Nexteer and Dana and urged delegates to take the side of the rank and file and nominate him to run against Fain and the rest of the apparatus.

The lesson from American Axle, Nexteer and Dana is that the fight for decent wages, benefits and working conditions cannot be won through the existing union apparatus, but only through a rank-and-file rebellion against it.

*For information about rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.*



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