

UAW calls snap vote at Bridgewater Interiors in Warren, Michigan, as it seeks to ram through sellout deal

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Workers at auto seating maker Bridgewater Interiors in Warren, Michigan are voting Tuesday on a four-year contract. The vote is being rushed through by the United Auto Workers without workers being given the opportunity to see the full agreement or time to carefully study its details.

In May, the workers, members of UAW Local 400, voted down a tentative contract by a 95 percent margin. Workers said the deal was insulting. The UAW bureaucracy ignored the will of the membership and instead of calling a strike extended the contract behind workers' backs and continued negotiations.

In a livestream to Bridgewater workers on Saturday, UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW Region 1 Director LaShawn English addressed workers to push the tentative agreement. The following day workers were brought to the Region 1 offices to be presented with contract "highlights."

"The days of allowing IPS (Independents, Parts, Suppliers) to be treated like second-class citizens has to end," Fain said in the livestream, without acknowledging that it has been the union bureaucracy that has enforced low wages and sweatshop conditions in the supply sector in order to lower costs for the Big Three auto bosses.

The local union leadership, Fain said, had requested that the UAW's President's Office and Department of Bargaining Strategies intervene in the negotiations, adding, "We have never turned down a request for help from any sector of our union."

There is no doubt the massive rejection of the first proposed UAW-backed contract set off alarms at Solidarity House, which then allocated substantial resources to try to put out the fire spreading throughout

the auto parts industry. The snap vote takes place just days after Fain and the UAW rammed through a vote on the fourth tentative agreement for 1,700 workers at the Nexteer Automotive plant in Saginaw, Michigan.

Nexteer workers had voted down three previous UAW-backed contracts, all containing virtually the same miserable terms, with starting pay at \$19.50 an hour and top wages only rising to \$27 after four-and-a-half years. This is less than what workers were making at the former GM Saginaw Steering plant in 2005, although inflation has risen by 70 percent since then. The UAW was only able to narrowly force through contract by resorting to the most underhanded methods. This included holding the vote inside the plant under management's watchful eyes. On June 12, Antwiane Sanders, a Nexteer worker with more than 10 years, was fired for criticizing a UAW International representative pushing the deal during an in-plant contract rollout meeting.

Under the highlights distributed to Bridgewater workers Sunday, the new starting pay for production workers is set at a poverty level \$20 an hour and only rises to \$29 over a four year progression. The ratification bonus was bumped to \$2,000—before taxes and union dues are deducted—and seniority workers will be eligible for three annual \$750 lump sum bonuses contingent on working 1,500 hours.

A large portion of pay increase will be eaten up by inflation, which is now running at 4.2 percent annually. There is no indication that the agreement includes cost-of-living raises, pensions, profits sharing, job security or other key demands raised by workers.

Starting pay at Bridgewater is currently at a starvation \$17.50 an hour and the majority of the 1,000 workers at

the facility are currently making less than \$21 an hour.

Bridgewater also operates plants in the city of Detroit and Lansing that are under separate contracts. The company was originally operated by Johnson Controls, which spun off the operation in 2016 under a joint venture. President and CEO Ronald E. Hall Jr. has reportedly earned \$50 million in compensation over the past three years. It generates an estimated \$2 billion in annual revenue and is one of the largest “black owned” enterprises in the US.

A veteran Bridgewater worker contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* Autoworker Newsletter said that the feeling about the first tentative agreement rejected last month was, “Why is the union pushing this garbage contract?”

He indicated there was opposition to the new tentative agreement as well and much anger at the Local 400 leadership. The local president used to make \$95,000 and now he’s making \$118,000. “I think that’s outrageous,” he said.

Another worker who wrote in to the *Autoworker Newsletter* said, “I think our Local 400 UAW is trash. I think they need to be investigated and thrown out of the Local. Headed by Mark Hemphill President. They been selling out contracts for years, and it needs to stop. Bridgewater Interiors brings in close to \$2 Billion in annual Sales. Ron Hall, for him to be a Black minority owner cares nothing about his employees; low balls his employees around contract time every three years.”

Workers at Bridgewater are in a powerful position. The factory supplies seating for Ford, Stellantis, General Motors and Honda, including highly profitable vehicles like the Ford F-150 and Dodge Ram light trucks. With parts workers at Magna and Dana in negotiations, conditions exist for a united fight. The obstacle is the UAW bureaucracy which is determined to impose management friendly agreements to maintain the profits of the giant auto transnationals.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls for workers at Bridgewater to reject the tentative contract and take the struggle into their own hands through the building of rank-and-file committees independent from the UAW bureaucracy and democratically run by workers themselves. These committees should discuss and adopt demands that workers want and need and demand the setting of a strike deadline. The fight must be broadened to include parts workers at Dana, Magna,

Nexteer and workers at the Big Three in a common fight.



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