

“My union president acts as if he owns us. Like we’re his property.”

Indiana Lear worker denounces UAW effort to push through sellout deal on third vote

By Marcus Day
18 December 2018

At Lear Corporation’s auto parts plants in Hammond and Portage, Indiana, the United Auto Workers union is in the midst of its third attempt to force through a sellout contract. Voting on the deal—little changed from the first two—is scheduled to conclude Tuesday night.

Since October, the UAW has repeatedly tried to strong-arm workers into accepting a contract that maintains the tier system and poverty wages, increases health care costs, and entails new demands for efficiency and speed-up. Workers, however, have bravely defied these attempts, twice voting down the proposals by huge margins.

In response, the UAW has carried out an increasingly desperate campaign of threats and intimidation, harassing workers who post critical comments on Facebook or who share articles by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*.

Throughout the contract struggle, the WSWs has won a significant following among Lear workers, providing them with a platform to express their determination to reverse years of declining living standards. It has called for the formation of rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW, so that workers can take the struggle into their own hands and expand it throughout the auto industry and beyond.

Despite the best efforts of the union, workers continue to speak out against attempts to ram a pro-company deal down their throats. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* recently spoke at length with “Janet,” a veteran worker at the Hammond plant whose name has been changed to protect her from victimization by the company and the union.

“I need this to be something very heartfelt and honest. When I speak, I speak from truth and

experience from what I’ve seen. I hope you can hear the frustration in my voice.

“I feel from the looks of things, the president [of Local 2335, Jaime Luna] has something to gain from this contract,” she said. “He keeps pushing this same agenda on us.

“It’s going around that after the contract, the president is supposed to be getting a job with the [UAW] International, and the vice president and another union rep are leaving and getting other jobs. They’re negotiating something terrible and don’t care what happens to us, because they’re on their way out.”

Janet said that her coworkers were reporting that UAW officials were threatening workers with the loss of their jobs if they didn’t vote to approve the contract. Such intimidation tactics, in which the union seeks to blackmail workers and prevent a push for higher wages, have long been a standard tactic. “I was told that they were telling people in Portage that they could lose their job if they vote no. They’re saying that CSG, a temp service, will come in and replace us. Everything they’re doing, it’s starting to wear on people psychologically and emotionally.

“The vice president of the union had one of our brothers and sisters terminated,” she said. “Someone who had crossed paths with her. They kept it quiet.”

She continued, “They’re trying to win us over with a signing bonus,” a reference to the paltry “sweeteners” thrown into the latest proposal. “We haven’t got a raise since last year, and they’re not giving us the raise we were supposed to get back in August! They’re holding it as back pay.”

Janet pointed out the strenuous efforts of workers to achieve quality goals, only to be given insulting

“rewards” by the company. “We helped them get the quality flag. The only thing we got for it was cake and a t-shirt. To me it seems as if management cannot say they did or made anything. We built these seats and maintained the quality! Why doesn’t any of that reflect in this contract? We got nothing.”

She pointed to numerous other aspects of the deal, which would entail further setbacks for workers. “This whole ‘team’ concept, I think it could cause even further divisions.”

Asked about the two-tier wage system, she responded, “It’s actually more like five tiers or six tiers. Maintenance, senior people, those hired before 2010, then 2012, and then your Portage people.” The latter are arbitrarily classified as “sub-assembly,” with starting wages as low as \$12.10 an hour currently.

Janet said that workers were fighting for better health care, lower premiums and out-of-pocket costs, the reinstatement of cost-of-living increases, and “fairness and appreciation.” She spoke out against the grueling hours they were forced to work, saying workers deserved a shorter workday. “They could change our shift from 12 or 10 hours to 8 hours, and everyone could have their jobs and make as much money, and it wouldn’t be stressful.”

She also denounced the punitive absentee point system, in which workers are docked even for absences outside their control. “One year we had very bad weather, and we had a state of emergency, and we couldn’t even get on the road because they were closed down. Lear gave us half a point, and the UAW didn’t fight it.”

Janet said she saw many similarities between her experiences with the UAW at Lear and the record of the union at other companies. “This keeps coming up in every aspect of the auto industry. Negotiations, what negotiations? If this is what they represent, then they just need to call it quits.”

Referring to the indifference and hostility of the UAW, she said, “They have been this way for a while. But now, their attitudes are worse. They are very, very confrontational. If you were for us, you wouldn’t act the way you act.

“My union president acts as if he owns us. Like we’re his property.”

“We’re out there hot as hell at Lear, and they’re in the air conditioning in the union office! While we’re

out they’re sweating. And it’s 110 degrees. You think they open the door to the office and say to anybody, come in? They do not!

“The UAW really stands for ‘You all ain’t working.’ It’s just foul. Period. They have pushed the limits too far.”

Janet said she supported the struggle by workers at General Motors against plant shutdowns and layoffs, and believed that workers at Lear should fight together with them and other autoworkers. “I read some of the articles about it, and it breaks my heart. We stand with them. We’re not alone, and we need them to understand that they are not alone too.”

Janet said that months ago, “I never even thought I would have been having this conversation. But I thought about it and thought about it, and needed to speak out.

“Your articles are being read, they are being seen, and they are being shared, and that’s a fact. I have people who come to me and ask if there’s anything new. I’ve been speaking to some of my coworkers about rank-and-file committees. We appreciate you giving us a voice.”

The Autoworker Newsletter encourages workers who want to share their stories or who are interested in learning more about rank-and-file committees to contact us today.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>