

Union at Ohio DaimlerChrysler plant imposes contract without allowing membership vote

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DaimlerChrysler management and officials from the International Union of Electronic Workers (IUE) in Dayton, Ohio have agreed to impose a seven-year contract containing minimal wage increases and substantial concessions, although workers at the D-C Thermal Products plant overwhelmingly rejected a similar package earlier in the year. The workers were given no opportunity to vote on the slightly modified deal.

Union and company officials cited a 1995 contract provision allowing them to impose contract changes without the members ratifying them. Bob Price, president of IUE Local 775, said the international union made the decision to bypass a vote under the contract provision known as “letter 18”.

In February workers voted 1,367 to 48 against a proposal that would provide an hourly raise of \$1.20 over seven years, alter overtime provisions and allow more frequent drug testing. The new contract includes drug testing with cause after absences but leaves out a company proposal to pay overtime only after 40 hours a week, rather than the current practice of paying overtime after 8 hours each day.

The new contract gives hourly wage increases with one hand and then takes wages away with the other by cutting the yearly “gainsharing” bonus from \$4,500 a year to \$2,500.

DaimlerChrysler spokesman Trevor Hale said the company sought modifications in the local contract because it was having difficulty retaining workers at the plant, which produces air conditioning and ventilation components.

The local union president claimed that no vote was necessary because a union “survey” had found that 90 percent of the workers supported the new contract. Workers interviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site*,

however, expressed their outrage with the proposal and at being denied the right to vote.

Mike said, “When you do your math and figure in the gainsharing cuts, the wage increase is only 67 cents an hour and not \$2.00 like the company said in the newspaper. The company has been losing skilled trades to GM, so they get a \$5.00-an-hour increase with a cost of living allowance [COLA], but assemblers don't get COLA.”

The plant employs 2,000 workers, including 1,800 assembly workers and less than 100 skilled trades workers. Even with the \$5.00 increase, skilled workers at the DaimlerChrysler plant will make \$5.00 to \$7.00 an hour less than most General Motors plants in the Dayton area.

James said, “If 90 percent approved of the contract the union would have let us vote. The union says in 2003 the company will take a wage survey and if we are underpaid, we will get additional wage increases. With all the plants lowering wages, by 2003 we may be the highest paid workers in Dayton and still have to work loads of overtime to feed our children.”

According to union officials, starting pay for production workers will be boosted to \$10.00 from \$7.50 an hour and workers will receive annual pay increases until they reach the maximum \$11.50 hourly, with no COLA. The new contract would pay a newly-hired electrician \$16.81, up from \$13.40, and provide a COLA increase. Production and skilled trades workers hired before January 1, 1992—less than 15 percent of the workforce—will receive annual wage increases averaging less than 9 percent.

The wage rates being paid to DaimlerChrysler workers today are equivalent to the pay auto workers in the Dayton area received in 1979.

In a related development IUE Local 801 officials at

the Delphi Automotive's Thermal Systems plant in the Dayton area (formerly GM's Harrison Radiator) have moved to squelch speculation that a new agreement would allow them to make contract changes without a vote of members. Contract highlights to the 3,100 union members make no mention of the provision. But a union member said part of the final document includes language that reads, "The shop committee and local management are empowered to make deviations to the local contract as it relates to wages, schedules and processes in an effort to maintain and secure present and future work for the Ohio Operations."

The worker, who asked that his name not be revealed, said members fear IUE Local 801 and the company will impose a seven-day, 70-hour work schedule that was included in a contract proposal union members rejected in May by a vote of 2,340 to 206.

Local shop committee chairman Todd Viars denied there was anything in the proposed agreement that would allow the union or company to negotiate an agreement without the members having the right to vote. A handbill passed out by Local 801 union officials states, "The alternative if this contract is not ratified is not pretty. I am not threatening, I am simply giving you facts. If this contract is voted down we will be forced to issue a five-day letter, which would culminate into a strike. If we do have to strike, we are convinced there would not be much a future for our work force."

According to the so-called highlights of the contract, passed out by the union, the new proposal eliminates the alternative work schedule and boosts the signing bonus to \$1,500 from the \$1,000 proposed in the rejected contract. Its other provisions include a 3 percent wage hike over each of the next two years for approximately 1,800 production workers who are at the third or lowest tier of the pay scale. Third tier workers presently start at \$10.80 per hour and take 17 years to reach wage parity with workers who hired in before concessions were granted by the union in 1985 and are paid \$21.00 per hour.

Because of widespread opposition by rank-and-file workers the International president of the IUE, Ed Fire, traveled to Dayton to tell workers that they had to "understand the position the company was in." Workers voted on the contract more than two weeks ago, but the union has still not released the results.



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