

Ohio auto workers denounce union for deal on temporary employees

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Members of International Union of Electronic Workers (IUE) Local 798 in Dayton, Ohio are outraged over a contract signed by local union officials that will allow General Motors to hire temporary workers at its Bus & Truck plant. The terms of the agreement had been previously rejected twice by the membership, including one time at a mass meeting that ended with union officials calling the police to protect them from angry rank-and-file workers. Following that experience, members claim they turned down the deal in another vote, but the union refused to release the results of the tally and signed the agreement on June 29.

Workers say IUE International President Ed Fire is running the local union from the IUE's Washington DC headquarters. They accuse Fire, IUE District 7 President Mike Bindas and Nick Nichols, chairman of the IUE conference board, of forcing a new temporary work force agreement on the plant to increase the flow of dues payments into the union bureaucracy's treasury.

Opposition to the union officials and their corporatist relationship with GM has simmered for years, particularly since the IUE negotiated multiple wage tiers (it currently takes 12 years for new-hires to reach top pay) and a three-crew, two-shift schedule. At the time the company and union contended the concessions were needed to make the plant competitive and keep it open. The June 29 temporary work force agreement, however, has galvanized those who oppose concessions, and their anger has been directed at local and national union officials.

Shop Chairman Daniel Poffenberger, who signed the agreement, defended his actions in an interview printed in a local Dayton newspaper, saying, "This was as unpalatable to my traditional self as it was to everybody else's, but it was the right thing to do." Poffenberger told the media he had originally opposed GM's efforts

to bring in temporary workers, but had to approve the pact on orders from union higher-ups.

The temporary workers will be paid bottom-tier wages to fill in for absent workers. They will receive no benefits and will not be able to accumulate seniority. Nevertheless, according to the union-management agreement, the temps will have to pay full dues to the IUE.

Union and management officials contend the pact was needed to cover for absent workers and give seniority employees more time off on weekends. But one full-time employee said, "The temps will be working the assembly line at the same time GM is cutting the full-time work force by attrition because of manufacturing efficiencies expected with production of new sports utility vehicles in 2001."

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed several Truck & Bus workers about the deal. Many were reluctant to give their names because of fear of reprisal. Willie said, "The union should have never brought in temporary workers and I don't care how big [IUE official] Ed Fire is, he can be taken down. We have no details about what's in the agreement but, we hear GM is going to test a new work schedule for two months that has been rejected by members every time it was proposed."

Another worker said, "The two most important things for most of us was getting rid of wage tiers and stopping the new work schedule GM wants. The temps will help GM cut overtime, and since I only make \$11.86 an hour, I need all the overtime I can get. The new work hours wouldn't pay daily overtime after eight hours."

A young worker with less than 90 days on the job said, "I worked at Meijers and we had a company union. I don't see any difference at this plant. People

around here are always talking about getting rid of this or that union leader, but then what? The union leaders are like Reagan, the Republicans and the Democrats—they all do the same things to screw you.”

The increasing militancy of workers has led to open splits in the union bureaucracy, as each local official seeks to hold on to his position and deflect the anger of the ranks toward other bureaucrats. Local 798 President Tom Carter Jr. passed out a flyer saying, “I, for one, do not agree with hiring temporary workers.” Then the local executive board issued a statement to local newspapers saying they voted against the agreement.

Shop Chairman Poffenberger wrote in the union newspaper that the deal was a tradeoff to protect and increase IUE membership at two other companies. According to Poffenberger, GM supplier Customized Transportation Inc. (CTI) was about to lose its contract to supply parts to the truck plant. The loss of the contract would have cost the union local jobs at CTI. The work would have gone to Jamestown Industries, a non-union company that outbid CTI.

After the IUE agreed to GM's use of temps at the truck plant, the automaker gave the contract to CTI and said it would take no position on the IUE's current efforts to organize Jamestown's approximately 500 employees. CTI and Jamestown are low-wage parts suppliers and have gotten more GM contracts since GM spun off its Delphi auto parts division.

In 1997, some 8,000 workers at GM's truck, engine and Delphi Thermal plants, all in the greater Dayton area, were under the auspices of IUE Local 801. The IUE international came in and split the union local into two, creating Local 798, despite opposition from the membership. Last August, the National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint against the IUE International and GM over the split, because truck workers did not get to vote on the matter and GM has been withholding union dues and passing the money onto the IUE. A judge will hear the case on November 4.

Poffenberger is facing two charges from the local: one for signing the agreement and another involving his use of a union credit card and other financial issues. Carter, the local's president, had earlier been found innocent by a jury of union officials, but on August 20 union members voted to appeal the ruling and withhold Carter's pay. Carter has since appealed to the international union to reverse the membership vote,

according to IUE International President Ed Fire.



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