

# Ford concessions contract ratified with 40 percent voting “no”

Jerry White  
11 March 2009

In a sign of the growing opposition to the corporate and government attack on autoworkers and the collusion of the United Auto Workers union more than 40 percent of Ford workers voted to reject the concessions agreement accepted by the UAW, according to a tally released by the union Monday.

The deal replaces the 2007 contract with a new agreement, which eliminates bonuses worth thousands of dollars, shortens break time away from the assembly line; changes work rules and eliminates protections for laid-off workers. The agreement also sets the stage for gutting retiree health care benefits.

The UAW reported that 59 percent of production workers and 58 percent of skilled workers voted for the deal. The union did not reveal what percentage of Ford's 42,000 hourly workers voted. Several locals, which approved the contract, had a low turnout indicating both the disgust with the UAW and that opposition to the deal was even more widespread than reflected in the official vote tally.

At least three UAW locals in Michigan and Ohio—rejected the deal. At Ford's Woodhaven Stamping Plant, which employs 1,273 active workers in the Detroit area, the "no" vote was 73 percent. Workers at a similar sized unit in Lima, Ohio also voted down the contract amendments, but the percentage of the vote at this point is not known.

At Ford's Automotive Controls Holdings LLC in Saline, Michigan, a facility of 575 workers, 76 percent of members of UAW Local 892 rejected the contract.

There were significant "no" votes in several other factories across the country, including 49 percent at the joint Ford-Mazda plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, 47 percent at Livonia Transmission, 47 percent at the Kentucky Truck Plant and Louisville Assembly

Plant—UAW President Ron Gettelfinger's home local—41 percent in Chicago and 33 percent at the Kansas City Assembly plant.

The widespread opposition was all the more significant because of the non-stop threats by company officials, the White House, the media that rejection of the contract could lead to the collapse of Ford, leading to tens of thousands of layoffs, and the sabotage of the government bailout of General Motors and Chrysler. Moreover, opposition among rank-and-file workers was largely spontaneous as none of the dissident factions of the UAW bureaucracy organized any serious opposition to the pact.

The contract, which will run until 2011, eliminates cost-of-living increases and \$3,000 in lump sum bonuses, which the UAW promised would offset the wage freeze it agreed to in 2007. In addition, it reduces paid break time from 46 to 40 minutes for an eight-hour day and one-hour to 50 minutes for a 10-hour day. This translates into dozens of additional hours of unpaid labor each year. In addition, overtime will be paid only after working more than 40 hours a week, rather than after eight hours a day.

The Jobs Bank program—which provided workers with income security after they were laid off—was eliminated and supplemental unemployment benefits sharply curtailed. The gutting of these benefits will leave thousands of laid off workers with no protection, even as the auto industry carries out the most sweeping downsizing in its history.

The UAW also agreed to allow Ford to pay billions of its obligations to a union-controlled retiree health care fund in virtually worthless shares, rather than cash. The agreement all but guarantees that the UAW will slash the benefits of hundreds of thousands of retirees and dependents—when the UAW takes over provisions of

retiree health care in 2010.

Ford officials immediately praised the UAW for imposing wage and benefit cuts that will reduce auto workers to the level of non-union workers at US plants owned by Toyota and other foreign carmakers. Officials claimed the concessions were enough for Ford to avoid seeking government assistance like its Detroit competitors, although the continuing collapse of US auto sales—from 17 million in 2007 to an estimated 9 million in 2009—all but assures the automaker will follow General Motors and Chrysler into appealing for aid to prevent bankruptcy.

"By working together with our UAW partners, we identified solutions that will help Ford reach competitive parity with foreign-owned auto manufacturers and that are important to our efforts to operate through the current economic environment without accessing a bridge loan from the U.S. government," Joe Hinrichs, Ford's group vice president of global manufacturing and labor affairs said in a statement.

For his part, UAW President Ron Gettelfinger pledged his continuing collaboration with the auto companies and the Obama administration's auto restructuring plans. "Once again, UAW members have stepped up to make the difficult decisions necessary to deal with the reality of the current economy, the deteriorating auto industry as a whole and specifically the negative impact the economic climate is having on Ford Motor Co." UAW President Ron Gettelfinger said in a statement.

Now that the contract was pushed through it is expected that Ford will shortly announce its own downsizing plans. GM has said it will eliminate 47,000 jobs, including 21,000 in the US, and shut down another 14 plants in North America and Europe in the next few years.

Gettelfinger and other UAW officials met with members of Obama's auto task force Monday, including Ron Bloom and Steven Rattner, two former Wall Street investors who are experts in the carving up of unprofitable industries and the gutting of workers' pensions. The White House has given the UAW until March 31 to reach an agreement with GM and Chrysler or it could recall federal loans to the two companies, essentially throwing them into bankruptcy.

It is expected that GM and Chrysler will demand

even deeper concessions from their workers. The UAW has agreed to provide Ford with additional concessions granted to the two companies so as not to put Ford at a competitive disadvantage.

Kenneth Bringman, a worker at the Dearborn Truck Plant, told the WSWS, "I found out that the truck plant overwhelmingly turned down the contract but it passed throughout the Rouge complex. There was enormous pressure placed on the workers, with many of the union officials saying it would be in our best interest to pass it.

"I've been telling everyone we no longer have union representation, when management can line the UAW's pockets a lot better than we can. It is a shame that it has to be that way. I'm paying for somebody to protect our rights and they are bedding with the company.

"At the Rouge plant people died for what we are being asked to give up. I wasn't there in the 1930s but it turns my stomach that the union is turning its back on what people fought for and saying we have to help management.

"I was at the GM Fisher Body in Flint when they went out of business. I see the same thing happening all over again. It is not just in the US it is globally. It has happening to everybody while upper management is making millions. I can't believe how money is made in this country.

"I've been in the military I fully believe in the country, but I'm to the point I believe that we are no longer working in America for the people. It's all for the government and the rich. This isn't just going to affect the auto industry it's everybody that is hurting. I think all the workers in the world should walk off their jobs to show these governments."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**