

Ford workers oppose UAW demand for concessions

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The concessions agreement reached last week between the United Auto Workers and Ford Motor Company has been met with widespread opposition from Ford workers, who are beginning to vote on the deal this week.

The UAW, which granted Ford \$500 million in concessions last March, has returned to demand that 41,000 workers accept additional givebacks in line with those the UAW imposed on workers at General Motors and Chrysler.

Forty percent of Ford workers opposed the contract revisions in March, with several locals in Michigan and Ohio rejecting it outright. This was particularly significant because of the non-stop threats by company officials, the White House and the media that rejection of the contract could lead to the collapse of Ford, resulting in tens of thousands of layoffs, and the sabotage of the government bailout of General Motors and Chrysler.

Fearing the defeat of the contract, the UAW has delayed ratification meetings, rather than attempting to quickly ram through the deal. Meanwhile it has dispatched its functionaries around the country to lie to and intimidate workers in hopes of pushing through the sellout agreement.

This time the UAW cannot claim the company is near bankrupt. Ford made \$834 million in the first half of the year and has gained market share from GM and Chrysler, while expanding sales in Europe and China.

The corporate-controlled media has expressed concern over the ability of the UAW to “sell” the contract. Last week, the *Detroit Free Press* headlined its article, “Workers chilly to Ford contract: UAW members may oppose it.”

The UAW has agreed to freeze the wages of so-called entry-level workers and hire as many of these low paid workers as possible. This will enable Ford to accelerate its plans to get rid of higher-paid veteran workers and replace them with workers earning \$14 an hour—half as much as current workers—with little or no benefits.

Older workers who remain will be subject to speedup and job overloading due to the further destruction of work rules and job classifications accepted by the UAW.

In addition, the UAW has agreed to binding arbitration over wages and benefits and to ban strikes over these issues when the current contract expires in 2011, so that it can prepare to push through even greater concessions over the next six years.

In exchange, workers will receive a derisory \$1,000 signing bonus along with supposed “job security” commitments. These promises will have no more meaning than all the rest over the last three decades, during which time nearly three quarters of a million auto jobs were wiped out and hourly employment at Ford fell from 174,000 to 41,000.

The Socialist Equality Party is calling on Ford workers to reject the contract and begin organizing rank-and-file committees, independently of the UAW, to launch a struggle in defense of jobs and living standards. The SEP is calling for Ford workers to link up with GM and Chrysler workers in a nationwide strike to overturn the wage and benefit cuts imposed by the Obama administration.

The SEP has issued a statement raising the political issues in the Ford workers’ struggle and advancing a socialist alternative to the demands by the corporations, government and UAW that workers pay for the crisis of American capitalism. We encourage auto workers to download and distribute the statement. (See “Reject

UAW-Ford concession demands”)

On Tuesday, a team of SEP supporters distributed the statement at Ford’s Wayne Assembly Plant in the western suburbs of Detroit. The plant, which produced Ford’s compact Focus car model, employs 2,700 workers.

During the afternoon shift change workers who took the SEP statement stopped and spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*. There was overwhelming opposition to the contract and deep disgust with the UAW. Many workers agreed with the assessment that the UAW was a “union” in name only and functioned entirely on behalf of the corporations and the UAW apparatus.

Mike, a worker with 10 years at Ford, said, “What’s a contract if you keep opening it every few months? The last time they said we had to give concessions to save the company. We gave them health care, our pay raises and bonuses. I haven’t seen a pay increase in eight years.

“I told them I’d gladly give up the \$1,000 signing bonuses if they restored the 4 percent wage increase they owe me. Who is getting all this money they are taking from us? I know the UAW officials are still getting their bonuses. Now the UAW has a stake in Ford and other companies. When you own a company you can’t be a union. The UAW has been a business for a long time and Local 900 is the largest and richest local.

“I started at the Rouge factory in 1994 and I’ve been in three plants at Ford. The Michigan Truck Plant next door closed at the end of the last contract. The workers were told they could keep their jobs if they moved their families to Louisville, Kentucky.”

Commenting on the growth of mass unemployment and poverty in Detroit, where the official jobless rate has reached the Depression level of 30 percent, he said, “It’s horrible how many people have lost their jobs and their homes. My buddy said there were 27,000 houses about to be boarded up in Detroit. At the same time, the rich keep milking the system and getting richer. But people can’t get any help from the government. That’s capitalism 100 percent.”

A younger worker said, “The UAW is giving up the

right to strike—the only thing the workers have to fight with. It’s already no better than Wal-Mart inside the factory. We live in a global economy now. There is global slavery,” he said, but no global response by the unions.

Another worker commented, “The UAW doesn’t stand for ‘United Auto Workers.’ It stands for ‘You Ain’t Working.’”

Dan, a skilled tradesman with 18 years, said, “For the last 30 years we’ve been giving up everything. But the officials at [UAW headquarters] Solidarity House have remained solid—they haven’t given up a thing. After we gave up our cost-of-living increases the UAW officials boosted their own pay rates.

“I had someone tell me about what went on at one of these UAW conventions in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He said the officials had \$1,000 rooms and high-cost hookers. Then they drove away with a trunk full of booze to replenish their bars at home.

“We pay dues so they can keep up their living standards. Why do we need this union for? The local is holding an ‘information meeting’ to discuss the contract changes. I call it a ‘misinformation meeting’ because they won’t tell us what’s really in it. It’s like 1984 where the Ministry of Truth is in charge of lying to the people.”

Summing up the growing anger in the working class towards the Obama administration and its bailout of the banks, he concluded, “While we are losing everything there is going to be \$140 billion for bonuses on Wall Street. The government has taken all the money out of the Treasury to bail out the executives at AIG and other firms who are giving out the bonuses.”



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