

Opposition mounts to UAW-Ford concessions contract

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23 October 2009

Opposition from rank-and-file workers is mounting to the concessions deal reached by the United Auto Workers and Ford Motor Co. Top officials from the UAW attempting to sell the agreement have met with widespread hostility as voting by 41,000 Ford workers began Thursday.

On Wednesday, UAW Vice President and Director of the Ford Department Bob King was shouted down as he tried to defend the sellout agreement at the Dearborn Truck Plant in suburban Detroit. Opposition to the betrayal is so widespread that several lower level officials from UAW Local 600, trying to maintain credibility among workers, have publicly opposed the deal.

After the UAW dissidents distributed a leaflet calling for a “no” vote, King went to the plant in an effort to browbeat workers on the afternoon shift. Ford shut down production so King could push the pro-company deal. However, King was reportedly booed off the platform before he was able to speak.

“Everybody is against the contract here,” a Dearborn Truck worker with 12 years told the WSWS. “We don’t want to give up the right to strike. The union is selling us out. It’s sad. I read the UAW has billions in Ford stock. They’re not for us. There are 2,000 people here and it was so loud that King had to leave.”

Responding to the reports of Ford’s profits and the even greater haul on Wall Street, he said, “How much money do the rich need? They don’t want us to eat or anything.”

Ford has benefited from the Obama’s administration’s forced bankruptcy and restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler, having expanded its market share in the US and sales in Europe and Asia.

The company, which made \$834 million in profits in the first half of the year, is expected to report a half billion profit for the third quarter, Wall Street analysts told investors Monday.

Despite this, Ford and the UAW insist the company cannot operate at a “competitive disadvantage” and that auto workers must accept the same concessions that were rammed through at GM and Chrysler.

The agreement, which comes on top of \$500 million in concessions granted by the UAW in March, imposes a no-strike pledge until 2015 over wage and benefit improvements. It subjects compensation issues to binding arbitration until then, essentially stripping workers of the right to vote when the current contract expires in 2011. The UAW also committed itself to maintaining “competitive” labor costs with Ford’s rivals, including the nonunion plants operated by international companies in the Southern US states.

The deal also gives the company unrestricted use of so-called Entry-Level workers—those earning half the wages of current workers with sub-par medical coverage and no employer paid pensions. Wages for these workers—who make \$14 an hour—will be frozen for the next six years.

In the meantime, the agreement rips up job classifications and work rules, giving the company a green light to speed up and dump more work on current workers—furthering its strategy to rid the company of higher paid veteran workers and replace them with a cheap labor workforce.

A long-time Ford worker, now at the Dearborn Truck Plant, told the WSWS, “King thought the younger workers on the afternoon shift were weak and more vulnerable. But they were just as vocal and shouted him down.

“We had our experience with King when he was the

president of UAW Local 600,” he said, explaining how King helped dismantle the Ford Rouge complex and sold it off bit by bit. “About 200 of us hired into Ford in the early 1970s. In the ’80s they sold off Rouge Steel and eventually it was bought up by the Russian steelmaker Severstal.

“We had a choice to hire back into Ford. We thought that was safest because King told us that our seniority would carry. We came to Ford thinking we only had a year or two before retiring and we were told that we would have to work another 10 years to get a pension. We got no backing from King and the UAW.

“We’re very bitter. We had the two-tier wage system at Rouge Steel where the older guys were making decent pay and the young people weren’t making anything. It’s a *déjà vu* at Ford now and it’s happening in companies all over.”

Voting began Thursday for workers at the Wayne Assembly Plant and other related small car production facilities, located just west of Detroit. Aware of rank-and-file opposition, King was also on hand and joined the effort of UAW Local 900 officials to push through the deal.

Many workers expressed their disgust with the sellout to members of the Socialist Equality Party who were passing out a statement calling for a “no” vote and the organization of rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, to launch an industrial and political fight against the destruction of jobs and living standards. (See “Reject UAW-Ford concession demands”)

Several top officials from UAW Local 900 attempted to intimidate SEP supporters and workers who stopped to talk to them. They also called the police in an unsuccessful effort to have the campaigners removed from a public sidewalk outside of the UAW hall.

Several workers thanked the SEP campaigners for standing up and fighting the betrayal. One worker told the WSWS, “King just danced around and tried to push the contract on us. They’re saying that it’s mostly the entry-level employees who are going to get hit and we are going to keep our jobs and pensions.

“That’s no good,” he said, referring to the low wages and exploitation new hires will be subjected to. “I was just telling my buddy I would never work in a place like this for that kind of money. It’s crazy but that is what we are heading back to, unfortunately. The government, all these big banks and investment

companies get what they want and it’s slave labor again for the rest of us. We’re going 50 years back.”

The SEP urges Ford workers and their supporters to download and distribute our statement, “Reject UAW-Ford concession demands: Elect rank-and-file committees to defend jobs and living standards” and to contact the SEP.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact