

UAW says key local passed Ford contract by 51 percent

Many workers call vote a “fraud”

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24 October 2009

Detroit newspapers reported Friday that members of United Auto Workers Local 900 at Ford Motor Co.’s Wayne Assembly and Michigan Assembly plants narrowly ratified the latest concessions contract. The vote passed by only 51 to 49 percent, prompting allegations of fraud from workers interviewed by the WSWS and other sources.

Many workers were outraged by the result. “It was rigged,” said Dan, a worker at Wayne Assembly, who the WSWS first spoke to earlier this week. “What can we do? The UAW controls everything. If they want a vote to pass, it will pass.” When a WSWS team visited Dan’s plant earlier this week, the vast majority of workers we spoke to said they planned to vote down the contract.

Other workers at Wayne Assembly echoed Dan’s suspicions. “Huh, that’s funny,” said one worker as he entered the plant, “our votes always seem to pass 51-to-49.” “I don’t know anybody who voted yes,” said another. A worker interviewed by the *Detroit Free Press* said that the ballots used in the ratification vote were not numbered, contrary to normal practice.

The UAW also said that the deal was passed by members of Local 1250, serving Cleveland’s three powertrain plants on Thursday. The *Free Press* reported that the agreement was approved by 61 percent of the 1,265 workers at the Cleveland facility.

Ford has benefited from the Obama administration’s forced bankruptcy and restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler, expanding its market share in the US and sales in Europe and Asia at the expense of its rivals. The company, which made \$834 million in profits in the first half of the year, is expected to report a half-billion dollar 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 proposed Ford deal, 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 of ridding the company of higher-paid veteran workers and replacing them with a cheap labor workforce.

In order for the vote to pass, it must be approved by a majority of the 41,000 UAW members at Ford. The voting is scheduled to take place over the next week.

The UAW held an informational meeting Friday at Local 600 (bargaining agent for workers at Ford’s River Rouge complex) in Dearborn, Michigan, where opposition to the deal is particularly strong. When our

reporters called the UAW earlier in the week, a representative said that no decision had yet been taken on whether a vote would be held at the end of the informational meeting or put off until later.

Dozens of Local 600 members turned up Friday, despite bad weather. Almost as soon as the meeting got going, at 1 pm, workers began to trickle out of the building, many muttering curses. “The UAW people are just in there talking nonsense. First they said the vote would be today, then next week. They’re just up there praising the contract. I just don’t want to deal with it, so I’m leaving,” commented one auto worker.

Other workers voiced suspicions that the union was trying to drag the meeting on as long as possible, thus forcing the vote to be postponed until next week. UAW officials have been looking for ways to defuse or derail the particularly strong opposition in Local 600.

Mike, a Local 600 member, commented that “the UAW will ram this contract through just like they always do; the last contract passed by a margin like the one at Local 900. The UAW told us that the contract would prevent layoffs. A week later I got a layoff notice, and three weeks later I was on the street.”

Another worker told us, “They’re just standing there trying to sell this contract,” as he walked out the building. “It’s the same as 2001. The contract was approved by 51 percent. It was total bullshit.”

WSWS supporters argued that that the only way to fight against the concessions was to fight against the UAW. “That’s exactly right,” was a common response. We argued that workers should set up rank-and-file committees to throw the union out of the factories.

All Ford workers who want to set up rank-and-file committees to resist the UAW-Ford contract should contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact