

Mass opposition to Ford-UAW concessions contract

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Workers at four US plants have rejected a concessions contract backed by the United Auto Workers and Ford, including a 92 percent “no” vote at a major local in Kansas City, Missouri on Sunday and an 80 percent vote at Sterling Axle in Michigan.

About 1,700 workers at the Livonia Transmission in Michigan also voted down the contract by 52 percent, joining a radiator plant in Plymouth, Michigan that voted against the measure on October 23.

The growing opposition to the contract among Ford workers is in direct opposition to the position of the UAW. The vote in Kansas City came after workers booed and denounced UAW Vice President Bob King at a promotional meeting.

The workers at Kansas City Local 249 voted 1,712 to 147 against the contract. The local has 3,737 hourly workers, or 9 percent of the 41,100 Ford workers paying dues to the UAW.

This was the second local at which King was booed. A similar incident took place last week at Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan, where opposition to the contract is widespread. King was met with chants of “No, no, no,” from hundreds of workers.

Workers are opposing a contract that includes a freeze in wages and the expansion of entry-level workers. The company is seeking to push out higher-paid veteran workers and create a brutally exploited cheap labor force. Older workers who remain will be subject to speedups and job overloading due to the further destruction of work rules and job classifications.

By agreeing to binding arbitration over wages and benefits when the current contract expires in 2011, the UAW is essentially stripping workers of the right to vote on these issues and banning strikes over compensation until 2015.

These provisions mirror those included in contracts pushed through at Chrysler and General Motors earlier this year. The Obama administration forced the bankruptcy of these companies as a means of increasing pressure on workers to accept concessions and job cuts. In contrast to these companies, however, Ford is posting significant profits.

The opposition from Ford workers in Missouri is broadly felt at plants throughout the country. The Kansas City vote comes after a number of reported “yes” votes, including a 51-49 percent vote at Wayne Assembly Local 900 in the Detroit-area.

However, workers at that plant have said they think this vote was rigged by the UAW. Contrary to common practice, unnumbered ballots were used at Wayne. Most workers reported that they and everyone they know voted against the contract. (See “UAW says key local passed Ford contract by 51 percent: Many workers call vote a ‘fraud’”)

These sentiments were echoed at the Woodhaven Stamping plant on Monday. A large number of workers said they thought that the UAW stuffed ballots at Local 900. “We heard about the vote at Local 900,” one worker told the WSWS. “My friend works there, and he said nobody voted for it. But it still passed.”

“What’s to keep them from doing the same thing here?” said another. “Talk to anybody; we’re all opposed to it.” Woodhaven Local 387 held information meetings both before and after the afternoon shift change on Monday. The meetings have been organized by the UAW to try to impose the contract on workers. Of the hundreds of workers who poured out of the plant Monday, not more than a dozen or so had made it to either meeting, indicating broad opposition to both the contract and the UAW.

In the face of this opposition, both the company and

the UAW are working in overdrive to force through the contract. Ford said it would withhold its third-quarter profit announcement until after the vote is completed this week, so as to give the UAW maximum credibility. The fact that the company has been posting substantial profits has undermined the ability of the union to sell the concessions as necessary to prevent bankruptcy.

Meanwhile, UAW President Ron Gettelfinger is stumping for the contract, including at a meeting in Louisville, Kentucky. He has denounced opponents of the contract for supposedly lying about its provisions. Along with the company executives, Gettelfinger is demanding that Ford workers accept concessions in line with those that the UAW pushed through at GM and Chrysler earlier this year.

A new strategy for auto workers

The “no” votes at these locals should be welcomed by workers throughout Ford as a determined show of resistance to the demands for more wage and benefit concessions. Workers at the remaining locals should follow their lead by decisively rejecting the contract.

However, this must be seen as only the beginning of a struggle.

The UAW has once again demonstrated its complete hostility to the interests of its “members.” This is a trade union in name only. In actuality, it is a pro-company labor contractor whose principal responsibility is to force concessions down the throats of auto workers.

Any struggle against concessions must be waged consciously as a struggle against the UAW, which is now one of the biggest shareholders at GM, Chrysler and Ford. This rotten organization must be thrown out of the factories. Rank-and-file committees must be organized to defeat the contact and prepare national strike action.

Ford workers should reach out to their brothers and sisters at GM, Chrysler, and throughout the auto industry in a common struggle to reverse concessions. The poisonous “Buy American” nationalism of the UAW must be rejected and a special appeal made to auto workers in Canada, Latin America, Asia and

Europe to mount a fight against the destruction of jobs and wages.

Above all, the working class faces a political struggle against the Obama administration and the two parties of American capitalism, the Democrats and Republicans.

The forced bankruptcies and restructuring of GM and Chrysler by the Obama administration have set the stage for a campaign of wage-cutting by employers throughout the economy.

This attack on the working class is intended to pay for the bailout of the financial elite. Thanks to trillions of dollars in government funds, the most powerful banks are reporting huge profits, and Wall Street is on track to hand out a record \$140 billion in compensation this year.

A fight by auto workers must be linked to a new political strategy of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party has been campaigning among Ford workers calling for a “no” vote. A statement distributed to auto workers throughout the country (“Reject UAW-Ford concession demands”) concludes:

“The necessary basis for a solution to the economic crisis in the interests of the working class is the struggle for socialism, for democratic and rational control of the major banks and corporations. Workers must come face to face with the basic question of what determines the course of social and economic development—profit or social need, the wealth of the financial aristocracy or the interests of the working class, capitalism or socialism.”

We urge all auto workers who agree with this perspective to download our statement and distribute it among your fellow workers. Make the decision to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.



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