

The way forward for Ford workers

Socialist Equality Party
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With votes tallied at factories employing more than a third of Ford's 41,000 US workers, the concessions contract being pushed by the United Auto Workers appears headed for defeat.

If the deal is defeated, it will be the first time auto workers have turned down a national agreement recommended by the UAW since 1982.

The opposition among Ford workers to the cuts in pay and benefits and the no-strike provision being demanded by both the company and the union is an expression of growing resistance in the working class as a whole to the drive by big business and the Obama administration to make workers pay for the failure of the profit system.

It is the culmination of decades of job cuts and concessions in auto, combined with outrage over depression conditions for growing numbers of workers, on the one side, and record pay and profits for Wall Street on the other.

It is critical that Ford workers recognize clearly the forces that are aligned against them, and those to which they must turn to defend their jobs and living standards.

Break with the UAW

The precondition for a successful struggle is the understanding that the workers face no more bitter enemy than the UAW. Decades of betrayals and ever closer collaboration with the companies have transformed this organization into a corporatist business enterprise that serves the selfish interests of its top executives and their bureaucratic flunkies.

Even if the workers vote against the contract—and the vote is not stolen through ballot-stuffing and fraud—the concessions can be defeated only through the organization of a rank-and-file rebellion against the UAW. This means the development of independent and democratic organs of struggle of the workers

themselves.

A “no” vote on the contract will immediately be met with blackmail from both the UAW and the company. They will gang up to threaten mass layoffs and plant closures. They will denounce the workers for “breaking ranks” with GM and Chrysler workers who have been forced to accept sweatshop conditions under the bankruptcies engineered by the Obama administration. They will seek to organize a new vote to ram through the deal.

Ford workers should organize rank-and-file committees to overturn the UAW-Ford sellout, prepare strike action, and fight to mobilize their fellow workers to overturn the betrayals at GM and Chrysler. A rank-and-file negotiating committee should be formed to replace the company stooges appointed by the UAW. Preparations should be made to occupy all plants and work locations slated for mass layoffs or closure.

Such a struggle will win mass support from workers, youth and unemployed people all over the country and around the world. It can serve as the focus for a fight-back by the entire working class.

A political fight against Obama and the twin parties of Wall Street

The workers face a fight not only against the company and the UAW, but against the government. The Obama administration has spearheaded the attack on auto workers. With one hand it doled out trillions to the Wall Street speculators, with the other it forced GM and Chrysler into bankruptcy in order to impose deep cuts in jobs, wages and benefits. The government-led assault on auto workers was a signal to corporations across the country to slash wages and impose speedup.

In resisting the Ford-UAW demand for a ban on strikes,

workers are opposing a provision that Obama insisted on imposing on GM and Chrysler workers.

Ford has directly benefited from the government's restructuring of the auto industry. The company has gained market share from GM and Chrysler, expanded sales in Europe and China, and is making substantial profits. Since February, the value of its shares has increased nearly seven-fold. CEO Alan Mulally pocketed \$17.7 million in 2008 and is on the way to make millions more this year.

The actions of the Obama administration demonstrate that the financial elite controls both political parties. To halt the destruction of jobs, working conditions and living standards, workers must combine the mobilization of their industrial power with the building of a new political party—a party of, by and for the working class.

Nationalize the auto industry under workers' control

To defend the interests of auto workers and society as a whole, the auto industry must be taken out of the hands of the corporate and financial elite. It must be transformed into a public utility under the democratic control of the working class in order to produce high quality, safe and environmentally sustainable transportation and guarantee the living standards of the workers.

The banks and major financial institutions must likewise be nationalized under workers' control. The vast resources they control must be made available to address social needs, rather than further enriching an aristocracy of speculators and parasites. This should include a massive public works program to provide jobs at decent pay and rebuild the cities and the social infrastructure.

Unite auto workers internationally

It is necessary to reject all attempts to divide the working class along national lines. Economic nationalism and chauvinism are the stock-in-trade of the UAW and the AFL-CIO. As decades of "buy American" demagoguery have proven, such appeals play into the hands of the auto companies,

dividing American workers from their real allies—their class brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico, Europe and Japan—while lining up US workers behind their "own" bosses. Far from "saving American jobs," economic nationalism has helped the companies destroy jobs both at home and abroad.

The greatest strength that workers have is their international solidarity. The global power of capital, its ability to scour the globe in search of the cheapest sources of labor, must be countered by the global unity and organization of the working class. An appeal should be made to workers in Canada, Latin America, Asia and Europe to launch a common struggle in defense of jobs and wages.

The socialist alternative

The decay of the UAW is the inevitable outcome of its nationalist perspective and its opposition to socialism. The UAW long ago rejected the struggle for the political independence of the working class and tied the fate of auto workers to the fortunes of American capitalism. This has left the working class without a perspective to fight the onslaught of the corporations.

The present crisis gives the lie to all claims that capitalism can guarantee the working class decent living conditions. The preservation of this system means the impoverishment of the working class throughout the country and internationally, in order to pay off the gambling debts of the financial elite.

The alternative to capitalism is socialism—democratic and rational control of the economy to meet social needs, not private profit.

We urge all auto workers to take the immediate step of forming independent rank-and-file committees to carry forward the fight against concessions. If you agree with our program, make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party and build the new socialist leadership of the working class.

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