

Opposition to UAW-Ford deal

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Top officials from the United Auto Workers are fanning throughout the country in an effort to counter rank-and-file opposition and push through a new four-year labor agreement covering 40,500 Ford workers. Voting at 58 UAW locals began last Friday and will conclude on October 18.

The UAW has not released any results yet but at meetings in Dearborn, Flat Rock and Wayne, Michigan workers expressed hostility toward the UAW for abandoning pay increases and expanding the hated two-tier wage system.

“Instead of moving forward, we’re going back to a time we don’t want to go back to,” said Guy, a worker from the Wayne Assembly plant. “A lot of people are starting to stand up and realize the union is more for the company than the workers. We have no say-so in the union. They just want us to believe whatever they say.

“We have to fight for what our forefathers did and turn this down. Ford is offering pennies. Who can live on tier-two wages, once you have a child and home? You’ll hardly be able to pay your lights and water bill. My father worked at Ford and he raised four of us in a middle-class neighborhood; we ate good food and took vacations. All that is gone.

“America is going to be the cheapest labor. It’s going to be just the rich and the poor here.

“If they want Ford to be competitive, why don’t they make the top executives live on two-tier wages, instead of making five and six times what the CEOs make at Toyota, Nissan and the other companies?”

While praising the UAW for holding down costs, Wall Street analysts and the corporate media have expressed concern that the UAW might not be able to ‘sell’ the contract to its members. In 2009, Ford workers overwhelmingly defeated UAW efforts to reopen the contract, strip them of the right to strike and allow unchecked use of low-wage workers. On several occasions workers shouted down UAW officials,

including current president Bob King.

Referring to the ongoing ratification votes, UAW vice president James Settles told the *Detroit News*, “I worry about them all until it’s over. There are workers who will vote ‘no’ whatever happens,” the UAW executive complained.

Based on the cheap labor offered by the UAW, Ford is shifting some production from Mexico and China back to the US—“creating or retaining” 5,750 jobs—and boosting the annual dues revenue of the UAW apparatus by several million dollars.

“We’re bringing work here from other countries that we’ve never done before because the quality is so high from our members and we are competitive but still pay decent wages,” Settles told the *Detroit News*.

The “decent wages” for tier-two workers will amount to less than \$35,000 a year by 2013, barely enough for a family to survive. Meanwhile Settles and UAW president Bob King are getting by on salaries and expense accounts of at least \$200,000—six times as much—and saw their incomes rise 24 percent increase in 2009-2010, according to filings with the US Labor Department.

UAW executives are trying to bribe workers with lump-sum bonuses, hoping to exploit their dire circumstances, which the UAW created by accepting an eight-year wage freeze since 2003. “It’s an unprecedented amount of money, especially during these times,” Settles declared of the bonuses, which fall far short of the \$30,000 in wages and benefits the UAW gave away over the last five years alone. “If I came home and told my wife that I turned down \$10,000, I don’t think my key would work in the door,” said Settles, who, no doubt, rarely turns down anything offered by the auto bosses.

Ford workers, however, have reacted with anger both at the company—which paid its top executive Alan Mulally \$56.6 million in stock last May—and the UAW

executives. “This is not the best for us,” the Wayne assembly worker said, “it’s good for the company and the ones running the union who want seats on the corporate board of directors.

“They say they’ve brought jobs back. Where’s the job security for the 22,000 workers we lost over the last few years? When Ford says it wants to close a plant, we’ll be out of a job.”

Referring to the praise poured on Obama by the UAW for “saving the auto industry,” the worker continued, “When he was running, the president said, ‘Let’s take care of Main Street before Wall Street.’ Then the first thing he did was look after Wall Street; giving them billions and look where we are. That’s when he lost my support.”

A Dearborn Assembly worker said, “A lot of people are against the contract. They just handed us the booklet. It is like a slap in the face, an insult if you ask me. I don’t like the two-tier. I heard that Ford expects to make \$10 billion next year.

“What we need is a people’s worldwide union where there would be massive strikes to shut these companies down, by the hundreds of millions. If you would unite the people you would have clout.

“Corporate greed is alive and well throughout the world. I am all for the protests on Wall Street. If the people don’t take a stand, they are going to be sold down the river.

“The American worker wants to have a decent standard of living in a rich nation. But, soon we will have only the rich, the poor and the super poor. Social Security will be the new welfare.”

The Socialist Equality Party is campaigning for workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, to spearhead an industrial and political struggle to abolish the two-tier wage system and restore all pay and benefit concessions. We urge workers to download and distribute our statement and contact the WSWs. .



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact