

Chicago Ford workers vote down UAW sellout

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There are continued signs of strong rank-and-file opposition to the sellout contract agreement between the United Auto Workers and Ford. Workers at Ford's Chicago assembly plant voted overwhelmingly to reject the contract Wednesday. The vote follows the rejection of the agreement by members of Local 900 at Michigan Assembly and Wayne Integrated Stamping outside of Detroit.

UAW Local 551 reported that 77 percent of the 2,317 workers at Chicago assembly who voted rejected the contract. There are 2,700 hourly workers employed at the facility. Voting is currently underway at the Ford Chicago Heights stamping plant and the Brook Park engine plant near Cleveland, Ohio. Workers at the Sterling Heights, Michigan axle plant reportedly approved the agreement.

According to the UAW, some 54 percent of Ford workers voting so far have rejected the contract. Voting by 41,000 hourly Ford workers will continue into early next week.

The growing rejection vote reflects the hostility of Ford workers to the demands of the UAW that they accept further sacrifices in the name of making the company competitive. UAW executives openly boast that the contract, which continues the two-tier wage system and freezes pay for senior employees, will allow the company to "insource" jobs from low wage countries such as Mexico and China. Ford workers have been further angered by the huge pay package awarded company CEO Alan Mulally who got stock worth \$54.5 million on top of \$26.5 million in salary in 2010.

The rejection votes at Michigan and Chicago assembly are highly significant, since both of these facilities were slated to get additional work under terms of the tentative agreement. Chicago assembly was to

get 1,100 additional workers as part of a new third shift. Ford had also said it would "insource" the assembly of auto parts at the former Wayne Assembly plant adjacent to Michigan Assembly. Most, if not all, the new jobs will be filled by tier two workers making only slightly more than one-half of the standard hourly wage of \$28, saving the company millions of dollars.

The prospect of more jobs, the UAW no doubt calculated, would help secure ratification at these two facilities. By slating the Chicago and Wayne locals to vote first the UAW expected to build momentum for overall passage of the contract. Those plans now lie shattered.

In response to the growing signs of opposition to the Ford contract UAW President Bob King reiterated his support for the agreement. He warned that in the event of rejection Ford would likely substitute an even worse deal.

In a further move aimed at intimidating opposition to the contract, UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles indicated in a post on the UAW Facebook page that in the event of a strike Ford would likely attempt to keep operating by employing strikebreakers.

However, Ford workers show no signs of being intimidated. The determination of Ford workers to fight was indicated by their overwhelming vote in favor of strike authorization earlier this year. In 2009, Ford workers rejected additional concessions demanded by the company and the UAW, which included stripping them of the right to strike.

UAW executives have no intention of waging a fight against Ford in the event the contract is rejected. The UAW long ago abandoned the strike weapon in favor of unrestrained union-management collaboration. The UAW has not called a strike at Ford since 1976, when a nationwide strike lasted 28 days.

From the beginning, the contract negotiations have been little more than a conspiracy between the UAW and the auto companies aimed at extracting as much profit as possible from the labor of auto workers. UAW executives are determined to demonstrate their continued usefulness to the auto bosses by suppressing opposition to this sellout contract.

The interests of the UAW are enmeshed with those of corporate management through lucrative financial ties, not the least of which is the ownership by the UAW of billions of dollars of Ford stock through the control of the “voluntary employees’ beneficiary association,” or VEBA trust fund, which manages health care benefits for retirees. The UAW is determined not to take any action that impinges on Ford’s profits, undermining the value of its stock holdings.

Further, a prolonged strike would threaten to deplete the UAW strike fund, which accounts for the largest share of the union’s more than \$1 billion in assets. The strike fund exists not for the purpose of struggle, but as a slush fund to maintain the bloated and overpaid UAW staff. The UAW disburses more than \$90 million annually to top officers, including UAW President Bob King, who makes more than \$153,000 a year, not counting tens of thousands more in various perks and benefits. UAW Secretary Treasurer Dennis Williams takes in \$142,000 while the various international vice presidents, including Ford department head James Settles, make \$137,000 plus expenses.

Rejection of the contract by Ford workers is only the first step. Workers should begin preparation for strike action now by setting up rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW to fight for the abolishing of the two-tier wage and the restoration of all pay and benefit concessions, including the restoration of cost of living allowances and annual pay increases.

Ford workers must establish contacts with auto workers at all Ford plants as well as General Motors, Chrysler and the nonunion auto plants. Threats of the use of strikebreakers must be met through mass picketing to shut down all of the auto factories.

Workers in the United States face the same enemy as the workers in China, Mexico and every other country, the giant transnational corporations. Auto workers must reject the poisonous “Buy American” chauvinism of the UAW and seek to unite their struggles with those of workers internationally in a common struggle against

the profit system.

A serious struggle against the auto companies will entail a collision with the Obama administration, which is seeking to revive US manufacturing by making the US a cheap labor haven. The working class must organize itself as an independent political force to oppose the control of the financial elite over all aspects of economic and social life. Society must be reorganized on a rational basis to use the vast productive forces created by the working class for the common interest, not for the accumulation of private wealth for the privileged few. This includes the nationalization of the auto companies as public utilities under the democratic control of the working class.



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