

UAW seeks to ram through Ford sellout

Jerry White
18 October 2011

The United Auto Workers apparatus has pulled out all the stops to defeat rank-and-file opposition and impose a new four-year labor agreement on Ford workers. The contract will further erode workers' living standards, even as the number two US automaker pulls in billions in profits.

With workers at several factories, including three large assembly plants in Ohio and Kentucky, still voting, the UAW claimed Monday that the deal was supported by 62 percent of workers. As of last Friday, only 50.8 percent of workers had voted "yes" and momentum was pointing to a defeat of the sellout. Workers at two large assembly plants in suburban Detroit and Chicago rejected it, with a 77 percent "no" vote at the latter.

Over the weekend top officers and staff members from the UAW's Solidarity House headquarters in Detroit fanned out to ratification meetings in Minnesota, Michigan, Kentucky and Missouri to browbeat workers into voting for the deal. The UAW International gave local union officials marching orders to ram through the contract.

On Sunday, UAW Local 600—the union's largest local—reported a 62 percent vote in favor of ratification. In 2009, workers at the Dearborn, Michigan truck plant voted by 93 percent to prevent the UAW from reopening the contract, freezing the pay of new-hires for six years and stripping workers of the right to strike until 2015. In order to maintain any credibility among the ranks, a section of local officials opposed the deal.

This time, Bernie Ricke, president of UAW Local 600, said, "The entire elected leadership of our local, except one person, endorsed this agreement. We worked hard to get the truth out: That for these times, this is a good agreement for our members."

In Kansas City, the contract passed by a 90 percent vote after union officials told workers that defeating it would lead to the loss of 1,600 "promised jobs" at the plant.

"The Kansas City vote is an example of the local union taking the message to the shop floor and educating the members on the contract," declared UAW Vice President

Jimmy Settles in a statement Sunday evening.

He added contemptuously, "The Ford workers voting early on in the process were voting on emotion, but workers in plants with voting later in the process had a chance to learn everything about the agreement and understood how much their votes counted."

"Educating" the members included statements by Settles and Local 249 officials that a "no" vote would result in a strike and the possible hiring of scabs to replace Ford workers. While the UAW quickly sought to disassociate itself from suggestions that Ford—often referred to as its "corporate partner"—would carry out such a strikebreaking operation, workers got the message. Knowing full well that the UAW would do nothing to defend their jobs, let alone win a strike, many workers opted to vote for the deal or simply abstain.

Meanwhile, the UAW did everything it could to silence those opposed to the sellout. This included sending UAW Local 249 bureaucrats to threaten supporters of the Socialist Equality Party who were distributing statements opposing the UAW-Ford deal outside of the high school where voting took place Sunday. (See, "Reject UAW-Ford concession demands!")

Earlier this month the UAW barred reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* from a public press conference where Settles and UAW President Bob King announced the deal with Ford. (See: "UAW bars World Socialist Web Site from press conference"). The UAW also excluded the WSWS from a UAW-Ford Facebook page. Several Ford workers on the page denounced the six-digit salaries made by King and Settles, with one worker saying another bonus is coming after workers vote for the "no gain for the people contract."

On another Facebook page, a worker explained how the union was pushing through the contract. "Sorry Chicago, the people here in Sharonville, Oh are scared to death. The Union here is scaring everyone with strike and possibly losing jobs to replacement workers. We're on a downward spiral... I am definitely voting no and am proud of Chicago's solidarity."

There is substantial opposition at the remaining factories to vote. “We gave up so much, and we got nothing,” Donna Dezern, 51, told the *Louisville Courier Journal*. “Ford can keep the cash,” she said of bonuses offered in the contract. “I want to see my money every week on my paycheck.”

The sentiments of the rank-and-file workers cannot find the slightest reflection in the UAW, which is thoroughly beholden to the corporations and the Obama administration. The negotiations and votes are a thoroughly undemocratic process, aimed at concealing the conspiracy between two business entities against auto workers.

In exchange for driving down wages and backing the White House’s plan to create a cheap labor manufacturing platform to double US exports over the next few years, the UAW will receive nearly \$10 million in extra dues income. This will come from the 20,000 jobs Ford, GM and Chrysler are planning to bring back from China, Mexico and other low-wage countries. Moreover, the UAW is seeking to get its foot in the door at the nonunion plants operated by foreign automakers in the southern US states by proving that the union can police the workforce and block any demands by workers for improved wages and conditions.

King & Co. have nothing but contempt for workers who are forced to pay financial tribute to the UAW. In the event of a rejection, the UAW has already floated the idea that they would simply force workers to revote on the deal, with King saying nothing better can be expected in “this economy.”

Talk of a strike is essentially being used as a threat against workers. In the 1990s, the UAW did nothing to defend workers when Caterpillar threatened to replace the entire workforce with strikebreakers.

In reality, the UAW has no intention of calling a strike, even though nearly 98 percent of Ford workers authorized one. The UAW has all but officially abandoned the strike weapon: it has not called a national strike at Ford since 1976 and has accepted no-strike clauses at GM and Chrysler. Chrysler workers will vote next, and if they reject the contract negotiated by the UAW the union has already accepted binding arbitration, with analysts saying that an arbitrator would simply impose the deal agreed to by the UAW.

The UAW has a strong financial incentive to oppose strikes. The bulk of its \$1 billion in assets is held in a strike fund, which is used to underwrite the bloated salaries and staff of the UAW executives. The UAW

disburses more than \$90 million annually to top officers and an army of regional directors, servicing reps and organizers, as well as family and friends hired as stenographers and “office technicians.” In addition to tens of thousands of dollars in covered expenses, Bob King and UAW-Ford department head James Settles make \$153,000 and \$137,000 respectively.

This entire gravy train—based on a “labor-management partnership” against the rank and file—is threatened by a rebellion of auto workers. That is why the UAW has reacted instinctively to smother opposition to the contract and push it through.

The actions of the UAW only underscore the fact that it cannot be reformed and forced to respond to the needs of auto workers, as claimed by a host of phony dissidents and their pseudo-left supporters, including Soldiers of Solidarity, Auto Workers Caravan, Labor Notes and UAW Local 600 bargaining committeeman Gary Walkowicz.

Over the last three decades the UAW has been transformed into a pro-company organization, controlled by an upper-middle-class layer that answers only to the corporations and the government. The roots of this transformation lie in the purges of the socialists who built the UAW in the 1930s. The UAW was consolidated, by former president Walter Reuther and others, as a pro-capitalist and nationalist organization tied to the Democratic Party.

The only way forward for workers is to break decisively with this anti-labor organization and build rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW and the Democratic Party, to wage an industrial and political struggle, based on a socialist and internationalist program, to defend the social rights of all workers for well-paying and secure jobs.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact