

UAW pushes through contract ratification at Chrysler Dundee, Michigan Engine Plant

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The United Auto Workers reports that members of Local 723 at the Chrysler Dundee, Michigan Engine Plant have ratified the same local contract agreement they rejected in August. The contract puts in place work rules for the 615 members of the bargaining unit that will perpetuate forced seven-day 12-hour work schedules at the factory that builds four-cylinder engines for popular Chrysler models. About half the workers at the plant were hired in at the near-poverty level second tier wage.

The UAW forced the revote after a campaign of bullying and intimidation. Union officials warned that Chrysler would move work out of the plant if workers did not ratify the agreement. Despite the threats there was still a substantial no vote, with the local contract passing by a reported margin of 65 percent.

The terms of the local contract were dictated to the UAW by Chrysler management in order to maintain its production schedule at the plant, the only factory in North America that builds four-cylinder engines for the Dodge Dart and Fiat 500. The local agreement allows management to bypass rules in the national contract that place certain limits on forced overtime at plants that are deemed “critical” to Chrysler operations.

The brutal overtime schedule comes as Chrysler reported a 12 percent increase in sales for the month of September. Sales of the Dodge Dart rose 72 percent compared with August. Since emerging from bankruptcy in 2008 Chrysler has returned to profitability, posting a \$436 million profit in the second quarter.

“I recommended it. It has a lot of job protection guarantees,” UAW Local 723 Chairman Tom Zimmerman told the *Detroit Free Press*. The so-called job protection consists of giving UAW members the right to bump subcontractors out of their jobs. There

are about 250 outside contract employees in the plant performing such jobs as janitorial logistics and inspection. These workers earn less than plant production workers, some paid starvation wages of just \$9 per hour, but still pay dues to the UAW.

One Dundee Engine Plant worker with eight years seniority, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of victimization, spoke with the World Socialist Web Site following the vote. He commented ironically, “Wondrous vote.” He continued, “They were lied to. That is how it passed. It was the same old thing. They told people they would lose their jobs.”

“This contract gives management more power. They are going to force people to work overtime. Human resources will handle all overtime now. It used to be handled by the union.

“They can change your whole schedule when they want to. They have a right to work you on your off days. That is why they wanted the contract.”

He explained that as soon as the contract was ratified management had stepped up its campaign of harassment. “They made a big posting today about their new attendance policy. They are going to enforce it real hard. They are going to be real bullying with their attendance policy. Now they are showing their true colors. That is only the first thing they are going to strong-arm you on.”

The vote this week at the Dundee Engine Plant reportedly represents the first Chrysler local agreement to be approved since the signing of the 2011 national contract. It will undoubtedly be used as a hammer to force through other local contracts at Chrysler, in the first place at the Chrysler Jeep complex in Toledo. Last month the UAW abruptly called off a scheduled vote on a local contract at Jeep in the wake of the initial contract rejection by the Dundee workers. Since that

time, UAW officials have continued to delay the vote, claiming the contract has not yet been finalized.

The vote last August by Chrysler Dundee workers to reject the local agreement reflected a growing mood of anger and rebellion in the working class against the attacks by the government and corporations. It was followed by the strike last month of teachers in Chicago and most recently Detroit sewage treatment plant workers.

The forced revote at Dundee Engine Plant has once again demonstrated that the UAW acts as an arm of management to discipline auto workers. This agency of the bosses cannot be reformed but must be driven out of the factories.

The contact who spoke to the WSWs reported that at one recent union meeting an international UAW official had told Dundee workers to “suck it up,” and work the forced overtime.

He said that UAW officials in the plant had threatened workers who were circulating a petition calling for the removal of those bargaining committee members who had negotiated the local agreement. “Our chairman was out there intimidating people on that petition going around. They said they would have the company get rid of them. You see our union representatives buddying up with the human resource manager all the time.”

There is an unbridgeable gulf between the well-heeled union executives of the UAW and rank-and-file auto workers. A successful struggle requires that workers build new organizations, rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW that will fight uncompromisingly for the interests of auto workers and not accept the profit dictates of management.

This fight requires a new political orientation. The struggle to defend jobs, decent pay and benefits as well as create safe and tolerable working conditions brings workers into a direct conflict with the Obama administration, which is driving to lower US manufacturing wages in line with its policy of “insourcing,” that is underbidding workers in low wage areas such as Mexico and China.

The working class must build a political party of its own independent of the two parties of Wall Street, the Democrats and Republicans. The auto companies, banks and big industry must be placed under public ownership, democratically run and managed by the

working class in the interests of society as a whole, not the profit requirements of big business.



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