

UAW considers dues hike

Shannon Jones
7 December 2013

The United Auto Workers is reportedly considering an attempt to extort more money from rank-and-file auto workers by imposing a 25 percent dues hike, the first such increase since 1967. Dues are currently set at two hours per month. With the proposed increase, dues would rise to 2.5 hours a month.

A high seniority UAW member working at one of the major Detroit automakers and making \$28.125 per hour currently pays dues of \$56.25 per month. That would rise to \$70.32 per month. New hires, who, under terms of the most recent contract make \$15.78 per hour, currently pay dues of \$31.56 per month. That would rise to \$39.45 per month.

An increase in dues would likely have to be put before the UAW's upcoming Constitutional Convention, which is set for June, with approval virtually certain given the unrepresentative and undemocratic character of the union apparatus. In 1967, the UAW argued the increase was needed to bolster the strike fund in order to struggle for improved wages and benefits. That same year, the UAW called a 66-day strike against Ford that won, among other gains, an expansion of the cost-of-living allowance. That was followed by the massive two-month strike against General Motors in 1970.

No such argument holds water today. The UAW has not called a companywide strike in decades. The call for a dues increase is a desperate attempt on the part of UAW executives to shore up the union's income under conditions of declining membership and falling wages, the outcome of the repeated concessions it has helped impose on the workers it claims to represent. Since 2005 the UAW's membership has fallen 30 percent, to just 382,500. That compares to a peak membership of 1.5 million in 1979.

Real wages for veteran auto workers have remained virtually stagnant for the past 20 years. Meanwhile, the UAW has slashed the wages for new hires. The pay rate

for so-called second-tier workers has been reduced to less in real terms than the rate auto workers received in the 1930s, prior to the establishment of the UAW. Currently more than one half of UAW members work outside the auto industry, where average compensation is even less.

Meanwhile, those manning the UAW's bloated apparatus continue to rake in six figure salaries. Some 400 UAW international servicing representatives, vice presidents, organizers and other officials take home salaries and expense accounts in excess of \$100,000, topped out by UAW President Bob King who is paid in annual salary alone \$153,248.29.

While the UAW still sits on top of net assets of \$1 billion, most in its strike fund, its total assets have declined for the past six years. The call for a dues increase comes as two major industrial states with large numbers of UAW members, Indiana and Michigan, have adopted so-called right-to-work laws that ban the mandatory payment of union dues as a condition of employment. After the current national UAW agreement expires in 2015, workers at Ford, Chrysler and General Motors in Michigan will no longer be required to pay dues to the UAW. This threatens the UAW with a potentially massive loss of income as workers refuse to pay dues to an organization that has abandoned any defense of their interests.

The attempt by the UAW to squeeze more money out of auto workers further underscores the anti-working class nature of this organization, which has presided over one round of cuts after another.

At the time of the 2009 forced bankruptcy and restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler, the UAW agreed to a six-year no-strike deal that imposed cuts to retiree vision and dental benefits and expanded the two-tier wage. As part of the agreement the UAW received billions of dollars in shares of GM and Chrysler stock through its control of the retiree health

care trust fund, known as a Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association, or VEBA. This gave the union a direct stake in keeping stock values high by increasing the carmakers' exploitation of auto workers.

The UAW has also surrendered the principle of the 8-hour day by accepting the implementation of the Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) at a number of Ford and Chrysler plants. Under the AWS workers are assigned to staggered 10-hour shifts without paid lunch breaks and without the payment of overtime after 8-hours or on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the UAW is engaged in behind the scenes talks with German carmaker Volkswagen to recognize the union at its facility in Chattanooga, Tennessee without a certification vote by the plant's 1,600 workers. The UAW, in alliance with the German IG Metal union, has encouraged VW to set up a works council at the plant based on the German model. Such councils are prohibited by German law from calling strikes and must represent the interest of the company, not the workers. Such a setup would amount to the UAW helping to establish a company union at VW, even though company unions are nominally prohibited by US labor law.

The UAW epitomizes the fact that the unions have become little more than stooge organizations, at the service of the corporations. Workers should not contribute a penny to support the UAW and its bloated apparatus. The working class needs genuinely independent organizations, advancing a program of struggle against the transnational corporations.

The precondition for such a break is the rejection of the pro-capitalist and nationalist program of the UAW. American auto workers must unite their struggles with their brothers overseas in a common struggle against the multinational corporations. This requires a break with the Democrats and Republicans, the parties of Wall Street, and the building of an independent political party of the working class based on a socialist program aimed at reorganizing economic life in the interests of working people.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact