

UAW using economic blackmail in effort to ram through sellout deal

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With thousands of General Motors workers voting on a tentative agreement signed by the United Auto Workers for a new four-year labor deal, the UAW is mounting a campaign to break the resistance of rank-and-file workers and ram the sellout deal through.

Both UAW International and local union officials, having barely survived a rebellion by Fiat Chrysler workers, are telling GM workers that the contract on offer is the best that they can get, and that to press for more would only lead GM to shut its US plants and shift production to Mexico and other low-wage countries. A strike, they claim, would gain nothing and only hurt workers financially.

The UAW, which owns nine percent of GM's stock, is opposed to any struggle that would upset its lucrative relations with its corporate "partners." Instead, the union is collaborating with GM to use economic blackmail to force through a "transformational" contract that will establish a permanently lower wage and benefit rate throughout the auto industry.

In the first ratification vote on Saturday, workers at the Fairfax Assembly Plant in Kansas City, which has 3,230 hourly workers, defeated the deal by a two-to-one margin. After the stunning rebuke, UAW vice president Cindy Estrada held a conference call with local union officials at GM facilities across the country. She gave the local bureaucrats their marching orders: tell workers that GM will give them nothing more, and if they want a strike the UAW will put them on starvation rations, doling out \$220 a week in strike benefits from its \$600 million strike fund.

On Monday workers voted at five large factories: the Flint Assembly Plant (2,573 workers); the Flint Metal Center (1,173); Orion Assembly north of Detroit (1,553); Toledo Transmission (1,844); and the Arlington, Texas Assembly plant (4,125).

UAW Local 659 at the Flint Metal Center reported that 67 percent of production workers approved the deal, while only 52 percent of skilled workers did. UAW Local 598 at Flint Assembly also reported the contract passing, as did a smaller local representing 300 workers at GM's powertrain plant in

Bay City, Michigan.

As of this writing the results of other votes, which in some cases will not be completed until today, were not available. Other large locals will be voting, including at Fort Wayne, Indiana (3,900) and Detroit-Hamtramck (425) on Wednesday, and Delta Township near Lansing, Michigan (3,468) and Lordstown, Ohio (4,150) on Thursday.

A majority of the 53,000 hourly GM workers have to ratify the deal for it to pass. Voting is expected to end Friday.

In a video posted on the "UAW GM Talks" Facebook page, Todd McDaniel, the chairman of the UAW's national bargaining committee, who comes from the Bay City local, made the damning admission that his plant had "active workers that hire in making less for working 40 hours a week than some of our retirees make." He went on: "Does the company have the money? Yes. Do our members deserve raises? Yes. But there is only so much. Can we get it all and still maintain jobs? No. We can only get so much without driving them over the border."

In a message on the UAW Local 362 Facebook page, McDaniel told Bay City transmission workers, "I know there are people out there saying vote NO because this is only the 'first' offer. I am a member of local 362 and also on the national bargaining committee and I firmly believe this agreement has all of the total cash value that we will get without a strike. I also believe that even with a strike if we gain anything, and I am very doubtful of that, it will come at great cost."

McDaniel threatened: "1st our members, many of whom aren't prepared, may be out of work for many weeks or even months. 2nd we may not be able to get any job guarantees in an agreement after a strike and without work it's only a matter of time before we close a few more plants making us even weaker in 2019 talks. We have seen this trend for years and have finally started to turn it around in the last 5 years or so.

"3rd in order for a strike to be effective, you need public support. I don't believe we will have it. The public, in many cases already, views us as over paid, lazy, and greedy. When

the media starts reporting the economic gains we said NO to, do you really think they will support us?”

In reality, a fight by GM workers would win widespread support not only from Fiat Chrysler, Ford and other autoworkers, but from the broad mass of working people who, like autoworkers, have suffered relentless attacks on their jobs, wages, health care and pensions, even as corporate profits and the world’s stock markets have hit record highs. Such a struggle would also win support from autoworkers in Canada, Mexico and other countries who are also sick of the attack on workers’ jobs and wages by the global auto giants.

Because such a struggle would never be carried out by the UAW, rank-and-file workers must take the conduct of this battle into their own hands. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers to elect factory committees to unify all workers—first and second-tier, temporary workers and GM Components Holdings workers, GM Subsystems and contract workers—in a common fight. This struggle must be united with all autoworkers and other sections of workers, from steel and telecom workers to postal workers, teachers and other state and local workers.

Among GM workers, there is a deep sense that they must fight to recoup the losses stolen from them during the 2009 bankruptcy. A fourth-generation first-tier worker at the Orion Assembly Plant, near Pontiac, Michigan, told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “I’ve been here 15 years, and over the last 13 I’ve gotten no raise, given up COLA, and we’ve got nothing. This whole contract is not for us, a rotten six percent pay increase [over four years] while management is firing and getting rid of the higher-paid people.

“The UAW is like the Walmart Corporation. It is no longer for the people, it’s for the corporation. The UAW should never have agreed to different tiers, and now after saying [second tier workers will] get top pay after eight years, workers are supposed to feel like they owe them a thank you. But equal pay was in the foundation of the union.

“At Lake Orion there are so many ‘silent contracts’ because we build small cars. I’ve always said this plant is like a big experiment and what they are doing here they are going to send to every plant. It’s hush-hush, different contracts nobody knows about. Ever since the plant reopened, they got 60 percent second tiers here, and lots of workers at GM Subsystems and different contractors making \$15 or less and still paying union dues with crap benefits and no representation.

“When workers asked the International union rep at the meeting about all the things we gave up during the bankruptcy—COLA, being forced to take vacation time during the two-week shutdown, the absentee policy and everything else—all he said was, ‘We couldn’t get it back.’

“I’ve had eight surgeries to my hands and wrists, both of my elbows have been rebuilt, and I dream that after 25 years maybe I can get off the line into a less stressful job. But now all of those jobs have been contracted out for pennies. We’re the higher paid dinosaurs they want to get rid of.

“It’s hard to tell how the vote will go. The UAW has our plant torn apart with the multiple tiers. They want workers fighting each other. Then they want you to look at the \$8,000 signing bonus as if it is great. But after they take union dues and taxes out of it, it will look more like \$3,000.”

A worker at the informational meeting in Lordstown, Ohio said, “Anyone with a brain would vote this down. They think they can buy us with a few dollars.”

A temporary worker expressed his outrage at the contract. “This means they can keep us temporary for another eight years. We do the same work but get paid less and lousy benefits. We get three days off. And if we call off sick they will fire us.

“There is someone who has been temp for 2 and a half years, and the contract means they can keep him temp for over ten years. They figure they can force us to do anything since we want jobs.”

Another Lordstown worker was angry at the continuation of the two-tier system. “They say that this will bring everyone up to the same thing in eight years, but in four years there is a new contract and all that can get ripped up.”

A tier-one worker with 36 years seniority said, “When I started I was making \$7.10 an hour, and it took us three years to make top rate and we all got the same benefits. It sickens me that they are expanding two-tier system instead of eliminating it. We should be going forward, not backward.”



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