Close vote on UAW-GM contract reveals deep discontent

Shannon Jones
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Vote results from across the United States show continuing rank-and-file opposition to the tentative agreement between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors (GM) despite an all-out drive by the UAW to secure ratification. The deal has been voted down at several major facilities and passed at several others with substantial opposition.

As of this writing the UAW-GM agreement has been defeated at the following facilities:

Fairfax Assembly (63-37 percent production, 66-34 percent skilled trades); GM Tech Center (52-48 percent production, 66-34 percent skilled trades); Arlington, Texas Assembly (51-49 percent production, 84-16 percent skilled trades). The vote at the Toledo transmission plant was split, with production workers voting yes by a 51-49 percent margin and skilled trades voting no by a margin of 59-41 percent. However, the combined vote was 731-723 against, according to the Detroit News.

The following plants reported ratification: Lake Orion Assembly (61-39 percent production, 60-40 percent skilled trades); Flint Metal Center (66-34 percent production, 52-48 percent skilled trades in favor); UAW Local 659, an amalgamated local in the Flint area reported 66 percent of production workers voting yes and 52 percent skilled trades. Parts warehouse workers also voted 91-9 percent in favor. Lansing Grand River Assembly only reported a combined total for production and skilled trades, with a yes margin of 57-43 percent.

Flint Truck Assembly reported a split vote with production workers voting for the contract by a 74-26 percent margin and skilled trades voting no by 60-40 percent.

Several major plants will vote today and tomorrow, including Wentzville, Missouri; Ft. Wayne, Indiana; Lordstown, Ohio, and Delta Township near Lansing, Michigan, with voting ending Friday. A majority of the company's nearly 53,000 hourly workers need to approve the deal for it to pass.

After suffering a resounding defeat in the first vote at Fairfax, Kansas, the UAW has stepped up its campaign of lies and intimidation to secure ratification. The sellout deal, maintains the two-tier wage structure and offers only token raises to tier one workers while providing nothing for struggling retirees except an insulting $500 gift card.

Autoworkers are determined to recoup their losses, particularly since the 2009 GM bankruptcy, under conditions in which GM and the other Detroit automakers are making nearly record profits and paying billions to their top investors.

Workers contacted by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* told of the heavy-handed tactics being pursued by the UAW. A worker at the Toledo transmission plant said, "They had the vote in the plant. And right at the door where you go in to vote they had the whole shop committee lined up calling workers stupid and everything else if they voted 'no.' You basically had to go through a gauntlet to vote.

"They are also hitting Facebook, saying all the people who vote 'no' are greedy.

"But still, with all that pressure, you had many workers sticking to their guns. They are voting for what they believe.

"The whole structure [of the UAW] is rotten. You have all these appointed jobs. It is all rigged in their favor. The whole world is watching right now. They are in the spotlight."

A worker at Orion Assembly said, "The information meeting had all the international reps there from the UAW. The union is telling us if we turn it down we could get worse. They said if we went on strike it would be an economic strike and we could be replaced by strikebreakers. They tried to scare people.

"They didn't make any demands on the corporation for anything. Our union is totally separate from us. They

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don’t even come out on the floor.

“They do everything they can to divide people. There are so many wage differences it is not funny. They have inspectors on the floor making $9 an hour. They check every car. Isn’t that ridiculous? They are working next to people making $29 an hour.”

A Colorado worker, said, “The contract is horrible. These kids need the money. They’re making less money and they need it so it looks like they’re going to vote for it. Today they sent a union servicing rep to the plant.

“The UAW isn’t for us—they’re their own business. Where we work the company doesn’t even abide by the contract, they do what they want to do and the union doesn’t even show up. We file grievances and they don’t do anything. They’re in bed with them. Nobody is accountable and nothing is done. We have waited 2 years for grievances.

“When we got here it was bad—I cried because I wanted to go home because of what they do to us at work. They just wanted us to go faster and faster. They target the temp workers who they don’t like. They get rid of them if they don’t listen to them and do what they want.”

A WSWS reporting team also spoke to workers at the Warren transmission plant in suburban Detroit who had not yet voted. The team encountered strong opposition to the contract among both regular, temporary and contract workers.

“I don’t like the contract at all,” said one tier-one worker. “Why would they put a cap on the number of retirees who are getting buyouts but not on tier two? At least 20,000 are eligible to retire from GM, but they are only giving a buyout to 4,000.”

He said about 10 percent of the workforce at the facility was made up of temporary or “flex” workers. “Right now the status in our plant is that you can’t bump a temp. They can do basically with the temps what they want.

“We have been working weekends all summer and a lot of guys are burned out. Now they are offering temps to work Saturday and Sunday. They can place them in any position. When a new job opening comes up, they just place a temp.”

A temporary worker said she and other temps were angry at their treatment. "I have been here since June and they are abusing us. We are working without benefits, nothing. They make us pay union dues, but they treat us like we have no rights.

“They are forcing us to work 40 to 60 hours a week and encouraging us to work through breaks and lunch. They told us if we work hard we would have jobs. Now they are saying they can’t promise us a job.”

A custodian said he did not pay any attention to the contract because of the poor treatment he received from both the UAW and the company. He works for Eurest Services, a low wage janitorial contracting company. “They treat us so bad in there. They give us no respect.”

A young worker said he didn’t like the fact he is still a temp and has to pay union dues, and said he planned to vote no. “They told us we have the right to vote on the contract and I think they think they can buy us off with the $2,000 signing bonus.”

Another temp said he plans to vote no because he thinks the contract will make things even worse for temporary workers. “My understanding is that with the new contract they will be giving temps insurance after 90 days. I think they will just let us go and hire in new people.”

He said although he has been there for over a year, the temps are day-to-day workers and can be replaced at any time. “Why would they keep us? They will just hire in new people before the 90 days expires so they will not have to pay the benefits. It stinks and the union agrees with it.”

Another tier-one worker said, “I have a lot of issues with the contract. It is more than just about money, it is the quality of how you work. I don’t like to be told when to take vacation and they aren’t doing much for retirees.

“I also don’t like the fact that they are not hiring the temps into full-time positions. They have workers who have been temps for five years.”

She said the UAW was pushing hard for ratification of the contract at her plant.

“I didn’t go to the union information meeting because I don’t need to hear them tell me what is in the contract book. I read the book. I am not a moron. I understand what it is saying. I don’t need to hear them tell me to vote yes.”

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