

UAW seeks to ram through Ford deal as results at GM show split vote

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The United Auto Workers union announced a tentative agreement with Ford Friday afternoon, before the final tally of a highly contested vote at General Motors had been made public. According to figures released late Friday night, a narrow majority of GM workers backed the contract announced October 25 by the UAW, but it was rejected by skilled trades workers.

The Ford agreement is based on the GM and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) contracts, which remove caps on second-tier workers and pave the way for a permanent lowering of base wages and benefits of Big Three autoworkers, as the companies push out higher-paid tier-one workers. UAW local officials are expected to approve the Ford agreement as soon as Monday, before it goes to the membership for a ratification vote beginning late next week.

The quick announcement of a deal at Ford is motivated by two factors. First, the union wants to force the Ford rank and file to vote as quickly as possible, once again giving workers virtually no time to study the deal and organize opposition. The union leadership is well aware of the enormous opposition among workers to the contracts and to the UAW itself.

A worker at the Sterling Heights Ford plant said the workers were being told there would be an information meeting next Thursday and a ratification vote the following day. “They’re stoking it up to be fantastic, the best deal ever,” he said, “but it is what we don’t hear that worries me. We’re going to sit in a little room while they tell us about how hard they worked for us and that we should hurry up and vote ‘yes.’”

Second, the UAW wants to shut down any discussion on whether or not the GM contract passed. The UAW is claiming that 58 percent of production workers voted “yes,” but that skilled trades workers rejected the deal by 59.5 percent to 40.5 percent. Overall, the UAW

reported, the contract was supported by 55 percent of the workers who voted.

According to the UAW constitution, a national agreement must be ratified by both production and skilled trades workers. This did not prevent the UAW from declaring the 2011 Chrysler national agreement ratified despite a “no” vote by skilled trades. At the time, the UAW said that the requirement for ratification by both skilled trades and production workers could be overridden if it was determined that skilled trades workers voted “no” for general economic reasons, rather than reasons related to skilled trades alone.

A skilled trades worker at the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly plant in Detroit said of the 2011 vote, “They sold us out basically. We went to court over that. They basically threw out every skilled trades vote. They lie, cheat and take, take, take.”

A GM skilled trades worker told the WSWS that he was called in on Friday to explain to the local UAW chairman why he voted “no” on the contract.

This indicates that local officials are going through the motions of asking GM skilled trades workers why they rejected the deal so that UAW President Dennis Williams can override their vote and declare the contract ratified. “I said I voted ‘no’ because they are taking away our work, taking away our job security” through expanded use of contractors, he said. “At this point in time, the contract is nullified until they override it.”

Production workers at many GM plants voted against the agreement, and there was enormous opposition at those plants where it passed. As voting concluded on Friday, two GM Components Holding plants reported “no” votes by margins of 80 percent. Almost 3,400 workers employed at four GMCH plants would top out at just \$19.86 an hour under the contract, far less than

the \$29 for GM tier-one workers.

A worker at the GM Marion stamping plant, where the contract was rejected by 53 percent, said, “Once the union gets in bed with management, it is in their best interest to see that the contract gets passed. We have conceded so many things. We gave up \$1 an hour and we gave up cost of living. The cost of living has gone up, but we are still making the same wages.”

The large “no” vote at GM—in the face of a coordinated campaign of propaganda, threats and economic blackmail from union executives—is a vote of no confidence in the UAW. It follows the massive “no” vote in the first round of balloting at Fiat Chrysler. At FCA, the UAW had to call another vote on a slightly reworded contract and hire a PR firm to ram through the agreement.

At both GM and FCA, most of those who voted “yes” on the contract did so not because of support for its contents, but because they were convinced that the UAW would wage no fight for a better deal if the contract was rejected.

As one first-tier worker from the GM Fairfax Assembly Plant who voted “yes” told the WSWS, “If we go on strike, what are we going to gain? I can’t afford to pay bills with \$200 a week” in strike pay. This is the amount the UAW said it would hand out from its \$600 million strike fund.

Over the past week, the union has been carrying out a nonstop propaganda campaign, telling workers that a strike would be a disaster, autoworkers had no support within the broader working population, and the company would respond to rejection of the tentative contract by shipping their jobs out of the US.

UAW officials, in their language and actions, are unabashedly revealing themselves to be company agents and scabs. Throughout the contract struggle at the Big Three, the function of the UAW has been to beat back opposition and demoralize workers, turning the word “strike” into a threat not against the companies, but against the workers.

The union has withheld information and issued lie after lie, sugarcoating the contracts with phony “highlight” handouts to cover up the joint UAW-corporate attack on the rank and file.

The Ford deal is likely to be even worse than the sellouts at Chrysler and GM. Since Ford has already reached its limit, under the old contract, of 29 percent

tier-two workers, it has been compelled to move second-tier employees into the first tier at the same rate at which it hires in new workers. Both the UAW and the company are determined to end this restriction.

Throughout the negotiations, the UAW and the companies have closely coordinated their efforts with the Obama administration and the Democratic Party. A major aim in the contract talks is a significant reduction in the companies’ health care costs, in line with the Obama administration’s pro-corporate health care overhaul. At the same time, the unions, companies and both big-business parties are determined to prevent the outbreak of a struggle by autoworkers that could spark a broader movement of the working class against falling wages and growing social inequality.

The UAW is worried that the longer the ratification process lasts, the greater the number of workers who will turn to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* for political direction.

To wage a fight against the sellout contract at Ford and continue the struggle at GM and FCA requires the formation of independent rank-and-file factory committees to coordinate opposition and unite autoworkers with other sections of the working class in the US and internationally against the dictates of the auto companies and their UAW stooges.



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