UAW scabs do bidding of US auto companies

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9 November 2015

The United Auto Workers is seeking to rush through a new contract on Ford workers and wrap up its months-long campaign to break the resistance of 140,000 US autoworkers and impose contracts dictated by the auto executives and Wall Street.

The UAW announced the Ford deal on Friday, even before the resolution of the vote by 53,000 General Motors workers on a similar agreement. A majority of skilled trades workers (59.5 percent) rejected the UAW-backed arrangement, while it was ratified, according to the UAW, by a narrow margin (55 percent) of production and skilled workers combined. To impose a contract after such a split vote is a violation of the UAW's constitutional bylaws, but it had no problem running roughshod over Fiat Chrysler workers' rights during similar circumstances in 2011.

Like the Fiat Chrysler and GM deals before it, the Ford agreement paves the way for the establishment of a permanently lower pay and benefit scale in the auto industry after the UAW colludes in driving out older, higher paid workers through speedup, victimization and supposed voluntary retirements.

Far from eliminating the hated two-tier wage and benefit system—the major demand of workers—the contracts will give the auto bosses free rein to introduce a third-, fourth- and fifth-tier of temporary and contract workers earning poverty level wages, inferior pensions and health care. Meanwhile, the insulting 1.5 percent annual wage increases for traditional workers will leave them with a two-decade decline in real wages of 25 percent by 2019.

The auto companies are already reaping record profits and a staggering 10+ percent profit margin in the US after the deals in 2007, 2009 and 2011, which reduced per vehicle costs by more than half. However, the money-mad speculators on Wall Street want even more, and the UAW, which owns a substantial portion of the automakers' stocks, has been more than eager to comply.

The "transformative" character of the contracts goes beyond wages, however. After dumping their retiree health care benefits into a UAW-controlled trust, which promptly slashed medical coverage for hundreds of thousands of retirees and their dependents, the new agreement will slash the coverage of current workers. This has been worked out in conjunction with the Obama administration, which wants to shift the cost of health care from the employers to the backs of workers who are already making barely subsistence wages.

Throughout the course of the contract battle, the UAW has proven not to be a "trade union" or "labor organization" in any sense that workers traditionally understand such terms. Instead, it has functioned as a corporate-labor syndicate and an industrial police force for management, thoroughly hostile to the needs and interests of the workers it falsely claims to represent.

At every stage the UAW has kept information from workers and lied to them, using threats and economic blackmail to beat back rank-and-file workers. UAW officials have unabashedly spouted the company line, insisting that the corporations have nothing more to give and that if workers press for any improvements then the companies will simply shut their factories and move to Mexico and other low-wage countries.

The UAW has transformed the strike from a weapon of workers against the corporations into a weapon against the working class. If workers rejected the contracts, like the Fiat Chrysler workers did last month, the UAW would be forced to call a strike, UAW officials threatened, which would leave workers on the picket lines for weeks or months with only $220 a week from the UAW's $600 million strike fund. Autoworkers would receive no public support, the UAW insisted, and in the end they would be forced to settle for even less.

The UAW hired a New York City public relations

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firm to sell its lies to workers, while during ratification votes it made workers run the gauntlet of local union functionaries who denounced them as "greedy" and "stupid" if they were planning to vote against the deal. As for the final vote counts, the UAW is more than ready to rig them to get the "right" result.

When the unions, despite their pro-capitalist leadership, still increased or at least protected the income of workers from diminution they could be termed "workers organizations." But as Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, explained in 1937, should the labor leaders "defend the income of the bourgeoisie from attacks on the part of the workers; should they conduct a struggle against strikes, against the rising of wages, against help to the unemployed; then we would have an organization of scabs, not a trade union."

This is a description of the UAW, the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win organizations to a tee. They do not unite workers but divide them. They are hostile to the class struggle and socialism and endlessly preach "class harmony" while the capitalist class wages a relentless war against the working class. In the factories, the UAW ignores the grievances of workers, enforces speedup, and oversees a dictatorial regime that resembles the darkest days of industrial slavery in the early twentieth century.

Whatever the outcome of the Ford vote—and workers should reject the contract with the contempt that it deserves—the outcome of the 2015 contract battle will be a further discrediting of the UAW. It is also an exposure of the numerous pseudo-left groups that insist on the organizational dominance of the "unions" and denounce as illegitimate any efforts by workers to rebel against their authority.

The transformation of the UAW and other unions into the tools of management—which is not just an American but international phenomenon—is the result not simply of the perfidy of the corrupt and bureaucratic officials who control them. It is rooted in the failure of the pro-capitalist and nationalist program of these organizations and their political subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party.

The long-term decline of American capitalism and the growth of transnational production pulled the rug from underneath these organizations. They responded by embracing corporatist "labor-management partnerships" and transforming from entities that pressured management for concessions into organizations that spared no effort to destroy the jobs and living standards of workers to make the corporations more profitable.

There is immense opposition and a desire by workers to fight. The fact that the UAW has had such difficulty in getting these sellout agreements through, despite the relentless propaganda campaign backed by the corporate media, is an expression of the mass opposition not just of autoworkers, but the entire working class.

The class struggle is beginning to emerge into the open. The aspirations of workers to secure their most elemental rights—for decent paying and secure jobs, for safe and humane working conditions, to collectively organize to defend their interests—will find an independent expression.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* and its *Autoworker Newsletter* have advocated, workers must form their own organizations that are democratically elected and controlled by rank-and-file workers themselves. The establishment of genuinely representative factory committees, based on the methods of the class struggle not subordination to the dictates of the capitalist system, will prove to be a powerful weapon for the working class.

Nothing has ever been won by workers outside of mobilizing their strength against the corporations and their political servants. Today vast sums of society's wealth—created by the collective labor of workers all over the world—are monopolized by the super-rich few and squandered on war and other socially destructive purposes. That is why the struggle to secure the social rights of the working class is above all a political struggle, which can only be resolved when the working class takes the reins of economic and political power in its own hands.

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