

UAW prepares to override skilled trades workers' rejection of GM contract

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The United Auto Workers is preparing to override the rejection by skilled trades workers of its agreement with General Motors, even as it moves rapidly to push through a similar deal at Ford.

Though the UAW employed a mixture of lies, threats and economic pressure tactics to pass the deal at GM, thousands of skilled trades workers rejected the contract by a margin of 59.5 percent to 40.5 percent. Overall, the UAW has claimed that the contract was supported by a narrow majority of 55 percent of all autoworkers.

According to the UAW's own bylaws, for a contract to pass it must be supported by a majority of both production and skilled trades workers. In 2011, it overrode this requirement when it announced that a contract at Chrysler passed even though skilled trades voted it down. In a transparent attempt to justify this action, the UAW claimed that workers were motivated by issues that were not specific to the skilled trades portion of the contract.

The UAW has begun going through the motions of asking skilled trades workers why they rejected the deal, with local officials preparing reports to the UAW executives early this week. In the corporate media, the rejection by skilled trades workers is being presented as an unfortunate "quandary" for the UAW that requires it to "hold up" official ratification of the agreement pending a meeting by the UAW executive board.

Behind the scenes, GM is implementing a plan to slash the number of skilled trades workers by 15 percent over the next two years through consolidation of classifications and harassment of older, higher-paid workers. This is part of the company's overall strategy, worked out in close collaboration with the UAW, to increase the percentage of tier-two and temporary workers by pushing out tier-one workers.

A skilled trades worker at GM's Fairfax Assembly Plant in Kansas City, Kansas told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that he was concerned over the fact that the deal continues the process of consolidating skilled trades classifications. "They are looking at consolidating pipefitters, millwrights and tool fitters," he said. "From a trade position, the lines of demarcation for your work is all that guarantees your job. They are going to combine those three trades into a general mechanical trade."

At Fairfax, he said, the company has reassigned a group of production workers as a "tech team" doing a lot of the work that electricians would do. "They are making less for doing a lot of similar work," he said. "I have nothing against the production workers, but we have been trying to stop this."

"They already got rid of carpenters and painters," he added. "They are going to eliminate 'red circle station engineers' at our plant. They watch and maintain the boilers. That is going away too."

While saying that he is "not anti-UAW," the worker added, "I am not sure why we are not getting the representation that I think we deserve. They have stock in GM through the VEBA [retiree health care trust fund], and that is a conflict of interest. I have called the NLRB, but they don't seem interested."

"We don't vote for anyone in the UAW leadership," he added. "I am pretty sure this week that the UAW International will override our vote. It is disturbing that the people we can't vote for will override our vote."

Many GM workers have taken to Facebook to denounce the GM deal and the plans to push it through. One skilled trades worker said, "The international can pay PR yes men, but they couldn't do anything for us gray beards or retirees at GM."

A production worker added, "Trades are our union

and they shot it down! Get your ass back to the table and make it right! United we stand, divided we fall! I'm production, but our trades turned it down! As a production worker I have trades back 110%!"



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