

Anger grows as Ford workers begin voting on UAW sellout

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Voting is set to start today for some 53,000 Ford workers on the sellout agreement between the United Auto Workers and the giant automaker. Following the pattern set at Fiat Chrysler and General Motors, the UAW wants to rush through ratification of the contract before rank-and-file workers can adequately study the details and mobilize opposition.

As it did at GM, the UAW is seeking to use the implicit threat of layoffs and plant closings to browbeat workers into accepting a regressive contract that will permanently lower the wages and benefits of Ford workers and ensure the company keeps amassing enormous profits. At the same time, the UAW is offering a bribe in the form of a \$10,000 signing bonus, including a \$1,500 advance on profit sharing.

In a statement posted on social media, Jeff Wright, President of UAW Local 249 at the Kansas City Assembly Plant, wrote, “There’s a fine line between getting as much as you can without losing jobs. There were several plants that didn’t have product and were in a similar situation to what we were in not long ago. We managed to secure new products and investments to save the jobs at those locations.”

In plain language, what the UAW means by “saving jobs” is an unending cycle of concessions designed to fatten the bottom line of the auto companies. The so-called job-saving cuts agreed to by the UAW have resulted in the slashing of some 40,000 jobs at Ford over the last decade and more than 100,000 since 1979.

The Ford contract language does not contain any limit on the number of lower paid tier-two workers, now called “in progression” workers. It lifts the previous cap on the percentage of such workers, which had forced Ford to move second-tier workers into tier-one pay and benefits at the same rate that it hired new workers.

In addition, this creates a “third tier” of lower paid workers for new hires at three Detroit-area factories--Sterling Axle, the Rawsonville powertrain plant and the Woodhaven Hot-Metal Forming Facility. Current second-tier workers will earn as little as \$16.25 an hour and reach a maximum wage of \$22.50 by 2019, \$7 an hour less than “in progression” workers with similar seniority. New hires will max out at \$19.86 an hour, nearly \$10 an hour less than the “traditional wage” when the contract expires in four years.

The Ford ratification vote is to take place even before the formal approval of the deal with GM, where skilled trades rejected the contract by a nearly 60 percent margin. The UAW has been conducting an “investigation” into the reasons for the “no” vote. If it determines that workers rejected the contract for general economic, rather than specific skilled trades issues, it will likely override the rejection vote and declare the contract ratified anyway.

The Ford contract provides a mere 3 percent wage increase in the first year for senior workers, who have not had a raise in a decade, followed by another 3 percent in the third year of the contract and lump sum payments in the second and fourth years. It includes an annual \$1,500 payment in lieu of restoring cost-of-living raises.

“In progression” workers must labor eight years before reaching the top wage, a meaningless promise since the contract runs just four years. The scheme is modeled after the “grow-in” policy of the Canadian Auto Workers (now Unifor), which began with three years in 2008, and was expanded to six years and then 10 years in subsequent contracts.

In recent days a number of Ford workers have written in to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to voice their disgust with the contract. A Ford worker from Ohio

wrote, “I will not vote for the agreement if it does not give back not only some of what we voluntarily suspended to help make Ford solvent over several tough years. I also am looking toward retirement. They have not seen a raise or any bonus in at least 10 years; if it doesn't happen now it won't happen. The next thing our guys up north will say is no more pensions.”

Another wrote, “I think we should fight for more. Our grandparents didn't do all that fighting for us to give up!”

And another said, “What's next? Wouldn't surprise me if after a couple more tiers they would be paid with UAW/Company scrip and live in UAW/Company housing.”

A WSWs reporting team visited the Sterling Axle plant north of Detroit on Wednesday to speak to workers and distribute the *Autoworker Newsletter*. Workers at the plant, which employs 2,100 hourly workers, have reacted angrily to the plan by the UAW and Ford to create a third tier of lower paid workers at the facility. As part of the agreement the UAW is pledging to work with Ford to move senior workers out of the plant in order to create an all low-paid workforce.

There was near universal opposition to the agreement at the plant. Several workers asked to take extra copies of the *Autoworker Newsletter* to distribute to coworkers in order to campaign for a “no” vote.

A tier-one worker at Sterling Axle said, “I don't care for their contract, but they are wiggling a carrot in front of members with that \$10,000 signing bonus, \$1,500 of which is our own profit sharing.

“I don't like the local agreement either. They are doing away with two classifications. There won't be any more job promotions. It will be based on transfer only.”

In comments to this reporter, a veteran worker at the Ford Woodhaven plant, which is also being impacted by the proposal for a “third tier” wage, said, “I am not happy about the contract. Our bargaining representative for skilled trades was telling us it was good. I said, ‘do you see what I see?’

“I don't want to leave our next generation contending with a company that doesn't care for them. There are a lot of workers that feel the same way. The UAW and Ford have put a kink in my beliefs. They grease their own palms.

“Our committeemen and other union guys said, it is what it is. You live with it or go somewhere else.’

“They want all us legacy guys out so they can flood the plant with lower paid workers. They are going to work us and work us.”

He said that the latest demand for concessions follows years of sacrifices. “Ford came to us in 2003 to say ‘we need to freeze your wages so we can compete.’ They said they would make it up in 2011. That didn't happen. Instead they gave [Ford CEO] Alan Mullaly \$60 million. I don't agree with that. They gave it all back to the managers and gave us nothing. They smacked us in the face.

“We are working harder and longer for the same money. You see it in Ford's profits. They have one-third the workforce doing the same amount of work. They don't want to give any of it back.

“They took cost of living. We'll never get that back. Instead they are giving us \$1,500. I used to get \$10,000 a year on that COLA. My standard of living has been going down little by little for the past 14 years.”

As far as retirees, the UAW-Ford deal offers pathetic annual payouts with cash or gift cards of just \$250 per year. One retiree writing in to the UAW Facebook page posted the following comments: “What happen to us the retirees who the union has no use for anymore...this bargaining unit is the worst in union history...retired just die union says your on your own but keep paying dues...not a worthy group by any means now...Pure cutthroat back door deals. [sic]”

Writing to the WSWs, a retiree said about the “third tier” wage at Woodhaven Stamping, Sterling and Rawsonville, “I'm retired from Ford. I no longer consider myself a proud UAW member after I read what they're going to do to our brothers and sisters at these 3 plants. What a shame. I always told my friends Ford was the best Auto Plant, that's not true now. I can only hope members have enough backbone to vote this contract down by a wide margin.”



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