

Opposition grows as votes begin on UAW-Ford sellout

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Voting started Thursday on the sellout contract agreement between the United Auto Workers and Ford and will extend into next week, concluding on November 18. The UAW is trying to rush through the pro-company deal just days after releasing its self-serving “highlights” and more than 1,000 pages of contract language.

As Ford’s 53,000 workers become aware of the content of the contract, however, opposition is spreading at the company’s plants across the country.

A group of angry workers picketed outside a contract information meeting in Sterling Heights, Michigan Thursday over provisions in the contract creating a “third tier” of lower paid workers at Sterling Axle and two other Detroit area plants. Workers told the WSWs that opposition was widespread in the plant, which produces axle and driveline components and employs 1,900 workers.

After decades of concessions, the contract continues the assault on the jobs, wages and living standards of Ford workers. A central feature of the deal is the removal of the cap on tier two workers, which will allow the company to hire as many workers with inferior wages and benefits as possible. The aim of the UAW and the giant automaker is to establish a permanently lower wage and benefit rate by driving out higher paid senior workers.

The contract fails to restore past concessions, including the cost of living allowance. Instead, it provides for a yearly lump sum payment of \$1,500. Tier one workers, who have not had a pay raise in over 10 years, will receive a three percent increase in the first and third years of the contract and lump sum payments in the second and fourth years.

As a form of a bribe, the contract provides for a \$10,000 ratification bonus, which includes a \$1,500 advance on profit sharing.

On the UAW Facebook page, a number of Ford workers posted angry comments in reaction to the proposed contract. Wrote one worker, “So far everything I’ve read leads me to believe that our contract will be nothing more than the GM contract with the exception of a little higher signing bonus, that of course will be taken from your profit sharing check

next year. Ask yourself if any of the top salary has been forced to make the same type of decision...Send it back people, look at the whole picture and vote your conscience, not what you think you will gain immediately, look at the long term picture.”

Another wrote, “One can only pray that they reject it, knowing Ford employees are not sheepish but rather ‘Ford Tough’ and not afraid to reject a contract that doesn’t eliminate tiers immediately, respect retirees, address the concerns of trade workers, or address a myriad of other concessions given up to keep the company out of bankruptcy; especially now that they are making record profits.”

As opposition to the Ford contract grows, the UAW executives are meeting to discuss how to run roughshod over the 60 percent ‘no’ vote by skilled trades workers that has held up the ratification of the four-year deal for 53,000 GM workers. Earlier on Thursday, UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada told local UAW officials during a conference call that she wanted to recommend the ratification of the deal because a majority had voted for it.

However, local officials appear worried this blatant violation of the UAW constitutional bylaws—which mandates that a majority of both skilled and production workers back a deal before it can be ratified—could provoke angry resistance from workers. By the end of the day, according to local officials in a later conference call, Estrada and Williams said they wanted to get “clarification” on skilled trades language from GM before ratifying the deal.

This is only a maneuver. There is nothing to clarify because both the auto bosses and the UAW are looking to wipe out the higher paid positions of skilled workers by consolidating pipefitters, millwrights and tool fitters, and replacing them with lower-paid production workers and contractors.

A WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* reporting team spoke to Sterling Axle workers picketing the UAW Local 228 hall to call for a “no” vote. Newly hired workers at Sterling Axle, Rawsonville powertrain and Woodhaven Hot Metal Forming

will top out at just \$19.86 after four years, far below the \$29 an hour tier one wage. The UAW has agreed to help Ford move tier one workers out of these plants in order to create a low-paid workforce.

Inside the UAW Local 228 meeting, workers confronted UAW officials who told them they had no choice but to accept poverty level wages if they wanted to keep the plant open. At one point, a woman close to the UAW attempted to bully workers. “She’s someone who is always on management’s side and everybody hates her,” a worker told the *Newsletter*. “She took the microphone and said ‘I had to pay my dues now you have to. You should be happy you have a job.’”

Theresa Emanuele, an alternate committeeman, said she organized the protest at the Local 228 union hall. “I am a legacy worker and I believe in solidarity. What the UAW is doing is not solidarity. They have singled out three plants not to get the in-progression wages. We want them to know we won’t go for it.

“They say they are going to close this plant, but I can’t fathom the whole reason for dividing us. There were people who transferred here from other plants and they were never told about this. I just don’t feel they should be discriminated against. If they had know this they would have been foolish to come here.

“And the local contract is just three pages of crap. You have to read between the lines. They are going to take away the job postings. We won’t be able to move around as much.

“The UAW is looking out for themselves. They have it in the contract that committeemen are able to work on holidays and weekends if there are just 50 people on a shift instead of 125. That is a big perk.”

A tier two worker involved in the picket told the *WSWS*, “It is horrible. This is not what they told me when I took the job. If I stay at Sterling I won’t make top pay. I have three kids. It takes two incomes to survive.”

Another worker, Ahmed, said he had worked 14 years at American Axle, a parts maker spun off by General Motors in 1994. The UAW betrayed a bitter three-month strike there in 2008, which resulted in savage wage cuts, mass layoffs and the shutdown and demolishing of the company’s Detroit factories.

“I was making \$28 an hour at American Axle before I left in 2009. After three years I was hired at Sterling Axle for \$15.78 an hour. Now I’m making around \$18.

“All we want is what everybody else is getting. We’re already making half the wages of tier one workers and I’ve got to pay out \$800 in medical bills under this BS 80-20 plan.

“If we don’t stop them at this plant they are going to keep on threatening workers with plant closings if they don’t give

up everything. I say go ahead close the plant, I’ll load up the truck for you.”

Ahmed said he wasn’t planning to attend the informational meeting at the local. “Why listen to the BS. They are going to try to sell this contract saying this is the only way to save this plant. It’s the same stuff they’ve been using since Ford brought the Visteon plants back into the company.”

Mike, a worker with eight months said, “The UAW said this contract was going to be a game changer for all the second tier workers. But now we have third tier wages. They want us to buy Ford cars but we can’t afford them with these wages.”

Brian, another young tier-two worker, said, “I left another parts company, Magna, and came here because a friend of mine became a Ford supervisor and said a contract was coming up and there would better wages for workers. I never knew that GM, Ford and Chrysler had this system where you make half the wages of the guy working next to you.

“The call it a ‘union’ but it is really a ‘divide.’ UAW officials like Jimmy Settles live in another income bracket. His family is already taken care of. But how can I solidify my family on \$16.50 an hour?”

Another second-tier worker said, “My husband is a first tier worker and he has had to give up so much over the last 10 years—no pay raises, no cost of living. The company is making enormous profits and no one is getting anything from it but the big executives. I’m going to vote ‘no’ on the contract. We’re being told lies that this is good for us. No one with a family can live on \$20 an hour. I’ve been here three years and I’m making \$18.86 an hour.

“The American Dream is turning into a nightmare. This contract is a slap in the face. When we retire we won’t have a damn thing. How are we supposed to save money for retirement when we are making so little?”



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