

UAW delays ratification of GM contract as it attempts to ram through deal at Ford

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The United Auto Workers announced on Friday that it is postponing a final decision on ratification of its pro-company deal with General Motors until November 20, after completion of votes on a similar agreement with Ford.

Last week, the UAW declared that the contract at GM had been approved by a narrow majority of 55 percent of all workers, but that it had been rejected by nearly 60 percent of skilled trades workers. According to the union's constitutional bylaws, any contract must be approved by both skilled trades workers and production workers for it to pass.

For the past week, the union has been going through the motions of “interviewing” skilled trades workers on the grounds that if it determines that the “no” vote was motivated by issues not relating to the skilled trades portion of the contract, then the deal can be ratified. Facing a similar situation at Chrysler in 2011, the UAW simply overrode a rejection by skilled trades workers.

In a vaguely worded statement, UAW Vice President for the General Motors Department Cindy Estrada said that following interviews with workers the UAW International Executive Board had determined that “further discussion with the company was needed to clarify and address these issues” raised by skilled trades workers. She did not indicate what issues that UAW was planning on “discussing” with the company.

Estrada said that the new deadline for ratification of the agreement was November 20.

Earlier in the week, there were indications that the UAW was preparing to ratify the contract immediately despite the “no” vote by skilled trades workers, with Estrada in particular pushing for such a move. A source quoted by the industry publication *Automotive News* reported on Thursday that Estrada believed that the

UAW had “addressed all the key issues that could hold up” ratification.

In behind-the-scenes discussions, however, the executives decided to delay action. The ongoing vote at Ford likely played into its calculations, as the UAW is wary of taking action that will provoke more opposition. Voting at Ford is due to be complete by November 18.

The UAW has given no indication that it plans on holding another vote after its discussions with GM. “You would think at a minimum that they would have a second vote for skilled trades,” a skilled trades worker at GM told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “but it looks like they are not going to do that, not for skilled trades, not for skilled trades and production, which is what they are supposed to do.”

The “no” vote from skilled trades workers was motivated by deep opposition to the ongoing attempts by the company, with the collaboration of the UAW, to reduce the number of its skilled trades workers by pushing out older workers through increased workloads, mandatory overtime and other measures. The company has plans to slash its overall skilled trades workforce by 15 percent over the next several years.

The attack on skilled trades workers has already had a significant impact on safety for production workers. “One of GM’s famous tricks is making safety cards disappear,” the skilled trades worker said. “If you have written up a safety issue, it might disappear. Then there is no record of who did what and what happened.”

The worker added, “At Lordstown [Assembly Plant] they have this new program where if there is a fault on a robot and there is something wrong, they now have production employees resetting the faults. When you have a robot or a heavy industrial piece of equipment

fault, there is a reason why. If you just keep resetting the fault, that is potentially dangerous. People could get hurt.”

Early voting at Ford has been split based on the handful of plants that have reported totals so far. The UAW has trumpeted its claim that the deal was backed by more than 80 percent of workers at Ford’s Michigan Assembly Plant outside of Detroit in the hope that this will influence other plants. However, the contract was rejected at Rawsonville Powertrain and Sterling Axle, two of three plants where, under the terms of the new deal, all workers will be capped at a wage far below the tier-two rate companywide.

One Sterling worker told the WSWS that opposition was overwhelming at the plant, though the UAW reported that the contract was rejected by a 60 percent to 40 percent margin.

“It’s an insult to the American dream that we were taught growing up. Most of tier-two folks that weren’t [Automotive Components Holdings], or formerly Visteon, came to Ford, GM, and (Fiat-) Chrysler and the UAW in hopes of a better life, a life where one could provide a comfortable standard of living for themselves and their families. As for tier-one, they gave concessions to their companies to keep them from going under.

“Now, when there’s expectations of seeing these concessions repaid, this is what the companies offer them? It’s appalling! It gives new meaning to the adage that no good deed goes unpunished.”

The contracts at Ford, GM and FCA are aimed at permanently lowering the base wage and benefit rate of autoworkers, including by eliminating any cap on second-tier workers (now dubbed “in progression”) and implementing plans to push out better paid, tier-one workers. With the collaboration of the UAW, the companies are also planning on slashing health care for senior workers as part of the overall strategy of the Obama administration to reduce costs for companies and shift the burden of health care onto the backs of workers.

As it did at Fiat Chrysler and GM, the UAW is hoping that it can use a combination of threats, lies and economic blackmail to push the deal through. To the extent that workers are voting “yes”—and the figures released by the UAW must be treated with suspicion—it is motivated largely by the understanding that the

UAW will not fight for anything better, a fact that has been demonstrated by the UAW’s actions throughout the contract struggle.

From start to finish, the UAW has approached the contract fight not as an ally of workers, but as their enemy, working in an alliance with the profit-rich auto companies. The UAW has proven time and time again that it does not even function as a “union” in the sense that its primary goal is not to unite workers, but to divide them and prevent them from fighting back. Because of this, workers must take matters into their own hands by building democratically elected factory committees to prosecute the class struggle and defend their interests.



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