

“Ford is making record profits...and we’re living paycheck to paycheck”

Widespread opposition to UAW-Ford sellout deal as voting continues

Marcus Day
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Voting continued over the weekend on the sellout contract agreement between the United Auto Workers and Ford. The UAW has sought to ram through the deal, giving workers practically no time to study the details before being forced to vote.

According to workers, at so-called “informational” meetings around the country, UAW International representatives and local officials have dodged questions and sought to cover up the attacks contained in the contract, while simultaneously issuing threats that workers will lose their jobs if they vote “no.”

A worker from the Louisville, Kentucky assembly plant said, “There was a big uproar, including from legacy workers, over the eight-year ‘progression’ for second-tier workers to reach traditional pay. The UAW reps pushed this like it was a real gain, and said we won job security too. In four years they can say due to economic circumstances they are going to have extend the years needed to reach top pay, just like they did in Canada. A lot of workers see this as another sellout, and they are going to vote ‘no’ on Tuesday.”

The contract, modeled on the deals the UAW reached with Fiat-Chrysler and GM, is completely in line with the ruthless profit interests of the Big Three auto companies, creating a permanently lower wage and benefit rate for workers. It expands the number of tiers, removes the cap on the number of second-tier workers (now dubbed “in-progression”), and maintains the grueling Alternative Work Schedule, among other retrograde measures.

The UAW is using a combination of lies and economic blackmail to push the contract through, including a \$10,000 signing bonus bribe—which includes \$1,500 from a profit-sharing check already owed to workers—and phony promises of “job security” at plants previously threatened with closure or mass layoffs. Many workers have also expressed skepticism in the validity of the vote counts.

At the Ohio Assembly in the Cleveland suburb of Avon Lake, the deal narrowly passed by a mere 31 votes among production

workers (485-454 or 51 to 49 percent), with skilled workers reportedly voting in favor by 55-45 percent. Earlier in the year Ford, in a joint announcement with Navistar, said it would shift production of its F-650 and F-750 commercial truck models from Mexico to the Avon Lake Plant and retain 1,500 workers. The UAW, whose president Dennis Williams sits on Navistar’s corporate board, insists “competitive wage structures” are needed to convince Ford to “in-source” production to US plants.

The deal also passed at the Michigan Assembly Plant in the Detroit suburb of Wayne. Earlier this year Ford announced that production of the Focus and C-Max small car models would be transferred to its plant in Mexico. A “no” vote, local officials argued, would imperil new product commitments for the plant.

The deal was defeated at two Detroit area plants—Sterling Axle where 60 percent of production workers voted “no” and the powertrain plant in Rawsonville with 58 percent of production workers voting “no.” At both plants, which were formerly owned by Ford’s spin-off Visteon, the UAW agreed to a special clause, which would cap the maximum wage of current second-tier workers at \$22.50 and new hires at \$19.86 an hour—\$7 to \$10 below the wages of “in-progression” workers throughout the rest of the company.

The deal was also rejected at the Buffalo, New York stamping plant with the 661 workers opposing it by a nearly 60 percent margin.

The UAW announced Saturday evening that the deal was approved at the Chicago Stamping Plant in Chicago Heights; however, substantial numbers of workers voted “no,” with 40 percent of hourly workers and 45 percent of skilled trades voting against the deal. More than 4,000 workers at the Chicago Assembly Plant will vote on Tuesday and Wednesday.

More than 7,000 workers at the Kansas City Assembly Plant in Claycomo, Missouri voted on Sunday, the same day as the UAW misinformation meeting, but the results were not available at the time of this writing. UAW officials reportedly threatened workers who took photographs of their “no” vote

ballots and posted them on social media, claiming the workers could be charged with misdemeanors.

While voting will continue at Ford through at least November 18, the UAW has for the moment postponed a decision on the ratification of its agreement with GM. The UAW said the deal was approved by a narrow majority of 55 percent of all workers, but was 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 and production workers for it to pass.

Fearing that running roughshod over the skilled trades workers might provoke additional anger from GM workers—and endanger the outcome of the Ford vote—the UAW announced it would make a decision on ratifying the GM deal on November 20, after the Ford vote.

Supporters of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with workers at Ford's Dearborn Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit and the Chicago Assembly Plant over the weekend, distributing hundreds of copies of the statement "Vote 'no' on UAW-Ford sellout contract!"

A veteran worker at Dearborn Assembly stopped to speak with supporters and said he planned to vote "no." "I want a real raise," he said referring to the miserly six percent raise contained in the Ford contract for so-called legacy workers who have not had a raise in a decade. "More than being concerned with myself I don't like what is happening with the new hires. They are never going to be able to get a retirement, yet they are going to be the ones paying in to support my retirement. I wonder if in the future there is even going to be Social Security."

A second tier worker at the Dearborn plant said he was also opposed the contract. "Everyone I talk with says they are voting 'no.' I don't like it that the contract is for four years but they are making us wait eight years to get top pay." He added, "I think the upper level of the UAW is bought off."

At the Chicago Assembly Plant one worker noted, "What is the point of the strike vote when they are never going to call a strike? They increased our dues supposedly to go on strike. Some of the guys in the union are telling us to vote 'yes' because they are saying it's the best deal we can get."

"I'm a 'new traditional.' I got bumped up [from tier-two to tier-one because previous caps on the percentage of lower paid workers that have been eliminated in the current contract proposal]. But it's not just for me. It's for the other guys. It took me three years to get dental and five years for vision. We have a two-tier benefits system. When I had an accident and had to get an MRI, the first \$1,000 was on me. My wages are already low and it was eaten up. They were also talking about a VEBA and a [UAW-run] healthcare co-op for us.

"For a lot of younger workers, they want that little extra money. Do we deserve more? Yes. Have the auto companies recouped their previous losses with record profits? Yes! [Former Ford CEO] Alan Mullally got millions to streamline

and cut labor costs. What he got is enough to pay thousands more for every worker. Instead, we live paycheck to paycheck."

"I've been reading your material very closely," a young worker said of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. "You all have helped me understand what is going on with the creation of new tiers and the 'in-progression' talk. I've only been here a year and I've been reading closely what you say versus what the UAW says."

She added, "I'm voting 'no.' Another thing I don't like is they have taken away the AWOL and they are saying we can only take days off twice a year. I don't like that. I go to school and work full time and I have a kid I have to take care of. It's hard. We all deserve better."

"We talk about the *Autoworker Newsletter* all the time," said another Chicago worker with nearly four years at the plant. "This is my first contract. When I first saw you guys out here last year, I didn't really have any understanding about the contract. But after reading the newsletter, I got really informed and was able to develop my own opinions about what the company and the union are up to. I'm voting 'no.' This was supposed to be a negotiation on our behalf, but they are not doing anything for us. They are not ending two-tiers as they said they would. The company pays them to lie to us."

"I'm voting 'no,'" said another autoworker. "They screwed us over last contract and they're doing the same this time. I was laid off before and I know that when they say we have 'job security,' it's a big lie. And it's going on everywhere. My sister is a teacher and they are going through a lot of the same issues."

Speaking on the enormous inequality in society today, he observed, "It's the one percent that controls everything today. The Democrats and Republicans are the same. Our world is like a large farm with a lot of people working and slaving for the corporations. There are billions of us and they are screwing us over. The next generation is really going to face it. It's going to take sacrifices, but we definitely need to fight back."



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