

# As vote tightens, Ford workers denounce UAW sellout

**Jerry White**  
**18 November 2015**

With tens of thousands of workers voting today and tomorrow, the outcome of the vote at Ford on the proposed four-year agreement signed by the United Auto Workers will soon be decided. The vote was nearly evenly split as workers began voting Tuesday at major plants in Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio. Voting will conclude Friday.

There is widespread opposition among workers, despite the efforts of the UAW to ram through the deal using a combination of lies, intimidation and an \$8,000 signing bonus. Now that Ford is making near-record profits, workers are determined to recoup losses agreed to by the UAW.

The new contract retains the hated two-tier wage and benefit system, removing the cap on the percentage of lower-paid workers the company can hire. It also adds several more tiers of low-paid workers, includes an insulting wage increase for traditional workers who have not had a raise in ten or more years, and undermines health care and pension benefits for active and retired workers.

Workers began voting Tuesday at the Louisville Assembly Plant and the neighboring Kentucky Truck Plant, the Chicago Assembly Plant and the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan. Earlier this week, the UAW was delivered a stunning blow when workers at the Kansas City Assembly Plant—the largest Ford facility with 7,500 workers—rejected the deal.

This followed “no” votes at Buffalo Stamping and two Detroit-area factories, Sterling Axle and Rawsonville Powertrain, where the UAW accepted an even lower-paid “competitive wage structure” to supposedly save the plants. Even at plants where the UAW reported the deal passed, there was substantial opposition, including at the Ohio Assembly Plant near Cleveland where the UAW claimed it was backed by a margin of 35 votes, with over 900 workers casting ballots.

The main exception was the Michigan Assembly Plant, where the UAW began the vote in an effort to build momentum in support of the contract. More than three-quarters of the workers reportedly ratified the deal after essentially having a gun put to their heads. The vote occurred after the UAW announced that the contract, if approved, would include new products for the suburban Detroit plant, which was all but doomed to close after Ford announced that it was shifting production of the Focus and C-Max models to its Cuautitlán Assembly Plant in Mexico.

Fearing a repeat of the debacle it faced at Fiat Chrysler, where for the first time in 30 years the national contract promoted by the UAW was defeated, the UAW intends to ratchet up its campaign of economic blackmail against workers. UAW Vice President James Settles is scheduling a press conference for 11 a.m. today where he will likely threaten that the company will revoke its supposed “job commitments” if workers reject the deal.

“I don’t like anything in the contract,” said a Rouge worker with more than 20 years experience at Ford. “There is nothing in it for the new workers, and with all the money Ford is making they can afford to pay them just like us. As for the older workers like me who have gone 12 years without a raise, there is nothing for us either.

“Ford took so much away from us,” she said. “People died for what we have. In 2009 and 2011, after the GM and Chrysler government bailout, Ford asked us for concessions until they got back on their feet. That was six months before the International UAW reps gave themselves a raise, and the CEOs walked away with millions.

“I asked the UAW reps, ‘Why didn’t we get back cost of living adjustments, regular raises and equal pay like we were promised?’ They have nothing to say. The local officials are just as worthless and are getting paid off too.

I've seen them tell workers, 'Why don't you just go along with it?' when the company is abusing them. I will not stand for harassment.

"We're in the plant working like dogs. I was injured because of my work environment. Half of us in the plant have gone through surgeries because our bodies break down in there."

The Rouge worker also said that workers did not put it past the UAW to rig the outcome of the vote in order to overcome opposition. "I don't trust the UAW with the counting of votes. It's horrible. At Local 600 when you are voting they stand by you to watch and check you off. Then they stick the ballots in a bucket! That's so they can do whatever they want with them."

On November 1, workers at the Louisville Assembly Plant voted down a local contract pushed by Local 862, with 54 percent of production workers and 61 percent of skilled workers voting "no." The factory has 4,800 workers, and the nearby Kentucky Truck Plant has 4,300.

The Chicago Assembly Plant, with nearly 4,000 workers, also began voting Tuesday. The factory has large numbers of second-tier and temporary workers angered over substandard wages and conditions and inhumane conditions. Many of these workers were scheduled to be bumped up to first-tier wages but, under the new contract, will not be.

So reviled is UAW Vice President Settles that he failed to show up at the union's informational meeting last week, claiming he was sick.

Last fall, hundreds of temporary workers at the Chicago plant were told they were laid off by a pre-recorded robo-call. More than 30 women workers from the assembly plant and the neighboring stamping facility filed a class action lawsuit last year against management and top officials from UAW Local 551 for sexual harassment.

"I voted 'no,'" a young worker at the plant told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. "With the deal they got us, I don't see the two-tier system changing any time soon. The UAW is very content with what they are offering us. We should be arguing for full pensions, equal pay, a good wage increase with seniority and cost of living. We need an increasing living standard, not a worsening one.

"What the UAW and the company want to do is lower the full pay till they lower it to the lowest worker. That's not the way to go. It's another way of lowering the wages for everyone. I want more. I want a living wage. And I fully understand that what I'm fighting for is for other workers as well.

"The UAW is another arm of management," he added. Referring to big-business politicians like President Obama, who is overseeing the gutting of wages, health care and pension benefits on behalf of the corporations and Wall Street, he said, "All our political parties are capitalist parties—Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump; they're all right-wing. Even Bernie Sanders is part of this. I totally agree that we need a totally different system than capitalism. We need a socialist government."

Facing the growing radicalization of workers and opposition to its pro-company policies, the UAW has utilized a high-powered PR firm, BerlinRosen, to counter the social media campaign by rank-and-file workers and the growing influence of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

On the UAW-Ford Facebook page, a posting by the propaganda firm proclaims, "Upon ratification, healthcare for all UAW-Ford members improves and will remain unchanged for the life of the agreement." In addition, it states, "Traditional UAW-Ford members will continue to pay no premiums, deductibles or co-insurance."

This is a blatant lie. The contract commits the UAW to work with the company to force workers into inferior health care plans in order to avoid Obama's excise tax on supposedly high-cost health care plans. The tax goes into effect on January 1, 2018. Page 122C of the UAW-Ford agreement states, "If a member voluntarily remains in a plan that is expected to be subject to the Excise Tax, the parties agree that such a member will be subject to a maximum annual deductible of \$400 for single coverage and \$800 for family."

The Facebook page includes angry comments from Ford workers. One writes: "We have to pay a huge deductible, and we are retired. We also have co-pays and a monthly charge for our health care benefits. And when you start getting Medicare it's even higher. Good luck with your retirement."

In another post directed to the UAW officials, a worker writes, "Can we spread your salaries over 8 years like you are doing to our tier 2 employees? Tell the PR firm check will be in the mail in 2023 and see what they tell you."



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