

With contract facing defeat UAW bullies Michigan Ford workers to ratify deal

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With the vote on the UAW-Ford national agreement going into its final hours, the contract could be headed for defeat, with only members of United Auto Workers Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan left to weigh in.

An unofficial tally showed 52 percent of those voting so far have rejected the contract. According to the most recent reports, workers at the Ford Flat Rock Assembly Plant south of Detroit voted narrowly in favor of the contract, with a bare 50.7 percent voting “yes,” the contract passing by some 37 votes. In a split vote at the Sharonville, Ohio transmission plant, production workers ratified the agreement by a 52 percent margin while skilled trades workers voted 51 percent “no.”

These results follow the massive rejection of the contract at three major plants including the Chicago Assembly Plant, which voted against the contract by a 2-1 margin. Workers at two large facilities in Louisville, Kentucky also voted “no” by a wide majority. At the Louisville Assembly Plant 68.5 percent of production workers and 62.2 percent of skilled trades workers voted down the contract. At the Kentucky Truck Plant 65.1 percent of production workers and 64.6 percent of skilled trades workers voted to reject.

According to a report in *Automotive News*, even if every worker in Local 600 voted, the contract would have to pass the local by a 60 percent margin to assure its ratification nationally. So far only four of the 20 UAW locals voting have passed the contract by that margin.

Local 600 covers about 8,500 workers at Dearborn Truck Plant, Dearborn Stamping, an engine plant and other smaller facilities.

The pact has encountered strong opposition from workers opposed to the two-tier wage system and the fact that the contract stipulates an eight-year grow-in period for tier two workers to reach top scale. The

agreement offers a tiny three percent first year wage increase to tier one workers—who have been without a raise for a decade or more—and doesn’t restore past concessions such as cost of living increases.

The UAW is mounting a last minute strong-arm campaign to obtain ratification. This has involved threats and intimidation, including against *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* reporters (see video report). At a press conference at the Local 600 Union hall Wednesday, UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles suggested workers might lose their jobs if they voted down the contract or face a long, costly and fruitless strike.

An open letter to Ford workers by a veteran worker at the Dearborn Truck Plant exposed some of the tactics employed by the UAW against those questioning the contract. He reported on an exchange with Local 600 officials at a recent contract information meeting. At the meeting he asked why workers should believe that the contract language being voted on would not be subsequently changed, since the UAW had repeatedly reopened past contracts in order to impose further concessions.

At one point the plant chairman, Nick Kottails, told him to stop talking and have a seat. He wrote, “I wouldn’t sit down until I got a clear understanding of the untruth being told. While I was speaking, the mic was then shut off. The disrespect given only showed me that they didn’t want people hearing the truth. I just wanted people to be aware that there’s a chance the company may come back after ratification and force us to vote again.”

Another Ford worker denounced the bullying tactics Local 600 officials used as workers were about to cast their ballots at the union hall. He posted on Facebook: “Walking out of the green mile today (as y’all was

pushing for yes votes) there was a lady walking in front of me holding a VOTE NO sign. Summerfield, I believe the health and safety committee, not sure what position he holds, says, 'I hope you take that sign home and tell your family what you've done...and how there won't be a Christmas!'

"What kind of crap is that? Everyone in that local should be ashamed of themselves! You work for us! You should respect our right to vote how we want!"

Another worker writing on Facebook noted how the UAW had issued given its marching orders to Local 600 officials on the national bargaining committee. "So I learned that any of the UAW reps that didn't agree with the contract got strong armed today at Dearborn. Our so-called chairman and president at Dearborn Local 600 lambasted all of the reps and told them if they didn't support the contract with them—and they had to sign a paper with all the UAW supporters—they would be blackballed and they would basically be out of a rep job and never be a rep again. WTF is going on with the union? They are supposed to be representing us, not the company. I would like to know how much they get paid to shove this contract down our throat to get it passed. These cronies in Local 600 need to be voted out ASAP!"

Meanwhile, some Ford workers were questioning the accuracy of the vote count. One worker writing into the *Autoworker Newsletter* reported that at the Sterling Axle Plant north of Detroit many were disputing the tally. According to official reports 60 percent voted against the deal, but workers expected a much larger rejection margin since the plant is targeted in the contract for a new, substandard wage progression for second tier workers. Earlier this month a group of angry Sterling Axle workers picketed the union hall to protest the contract. "They need a recount," the worker wrote, "Everybody they know voted 'no.' They could not find anybody that voted 'yes.'"

A worker from the Sterling Axle plant told the *Newsletter*, "We gave up so much in '07 and '09 and they promised us that when the company started making money we would get it back. The company is making more money than ever and we got nothing.

"I do not want them to even touch my medical benefits. It is frustrating for a lot of people. It really is. If what they are offering now passes, I honestly believe that they are looking elsewhere.

"I didn't really expect to get everything back. But something. They just keep taking and taking. This is actually worse because we just keep going backwards.

"The people in the plant are getting pretty fed up with it all. We are being lied to and manipulated. I understand that it is coming down to Local 600.

"I've been working at Ford for 20 years, believing in the union. They wouldn't do that to us. But once you guys started explaining what is really going on, and we can put two and two together. I believe a lot of people are seeing things differently, and the union is scared.

"How are they going to answer? They have been called out on what they are really doing."

An autoworker writing in to the WSWS criticized the contract for its treatment of second tier workers by removing the 20 percent cap in the previous agreement on the number of tier two workers permitted at Ford. "There was a ratio in place to move the lower tier up to top tier when they moved into the upper 80th percentile. That was (the) contract. Now under (the) new contract, the cap is gone and they have to wait a total of 8 years.

"So why would anyone believe that the proposed contract (8 year progression), would be followed when it expires. They believe that we are idiots. I was told like everyone else that there is only so much money available, and that if we reject the contract, that money will just be repositioned, but nothing added. They must think we are blind sheep with no minds of our own. VOTE NO. Then let's see what the counteroffer is."



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