

UAW announces ratification of GM contract, overriding skilled trades vote

Our reporter

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The United Auto Workers announced on Friday that it was ratifying its agreement with General Motors, overriding a “no” vote by skilled trades workers.

In voting that concluded earlier this month, skilled trades workers rejected the UAW-GM deal by nearly 60 percent.

The UAW reported that the contract passed with the support of a narrow overall majority of 55 percent, including both skilled trades and production workers. But, according to the UAW’s constitutional bylaws, a national contract must be approved separately by skilled trades and production workers.

The UAW released a vague statement on Friday declaring that it had held “discussions with GM” and that “the parties agreed to changes that protect core trades classifications and seniority rights.” After concluding that the skilled trades membership concerns had been met, “the IEB [International Executive Board] took action to formally ratify the UAW-GM National Agreement.”

Workers will have no opportunity to examine the changes in the contract that the UAW has proclaimed address their “concerns,” let alone be able to vote on the new agreement.

In an effort to justify its actions, the UAW wrote in its statement that though the constitution “provides for separate ratification votes,” the UAW “has put in place a process to ensure that minority groups have a voice while at the same time protecting the rights of the majority.” This “process” consists of the UAW and corporate executives meeting behind closed doors, reaching an agreement and declaring the contract ratified.

GM and the other auto companies have been engaged in a concerted strategy of eliminating higher-paid skilled trades jobs through the consolidation of job

classifications and other measures. In particular, GM has a plan to slash the number of skilled trades workers by 15 percent over the next two years. This is part of the broader effort to reduce costs by increasing the percentage of lower-paid second-tier and temporary workers.

A skilled trades worker at GM told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “In my view they violated the constitution. They are putting the screws in skilled trades. They are saying that they don’t care about our job security.”

On November 13, the UAW announced that it was delaying a decision on ratification until yesterday, a move aimed at putting the GM contract on hold while the UAW concentrated on trying to push through a similar deal at Ford. This left two weeks between the end of the vote and the final ratification.

“They used the two weeks to say that the skilled trades is holding up bonuses for production workers,” the skilled trades worker said. “The UAW was using the bonus and holding it up as a means of whipsawing production workers against skilled trades. Instead of everyone saying, ‘Hey we are all in this together,’ they were telling the production workers that skilled trades don’t care about them. That’s not true. There is nothing for me to fix if there is no production. At the same time, they can’t produce if we aren’t here to fix things.

“It seems like the UAW is trying to drive a wedge between the two.”

In fact, the attack on skilled trades workers in the GM contract—and in the Fiat Chrysler and Ford contracts—is part of a broader attack on autoworkers as a whole. The contracts preserve and expand the two-tier wage and benefit system, creating conditions for a further lowering of the labor costs for the auto companies.

They also create a system of new tiers consisting of contract, temporary and parts workers, while establishing the foundation for cutting health care costs for tier-one workers, who will receive almost no wage increase.

The contracts have faced mass opposition from all sections of autoworkers. The split vote at GM followed the vote at Fiat Chrysler, where workers rejected the first contract overwhelmingly and passed a second contract only after a campaign of lies and threats from the UAW. The GM vote has been followed by the vote at Ford, where the contract appeared heading for defeat as voting concluded on Friday.



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