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Accusations mount of UAW vote-rigging in Ford contract ratification

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Autoworkers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* continue to raise questions about the integrity of the contract vote at Ford, where the United Auto Workers claimed a narrow 51 percent vote last week in favor of the agreement.

Attention has focused in particular on the vote at UAW Local 600, covering Dearborn Truck, Dearborn Stamping and a number of smaller facilities. A massive “yes” vote at Local 600 was enough to provide a margin for ratification following the rejection of the contract by a sizable margin at assembly plants in Kansas City, Kentucky and Chicago.

The supposed overwhelming “yes” vote at Local 600 defied logic. This is a local union where workers in 2009 shouted down then-UAW Vice President for Ford Bob King as he tried to defend a concessions deal negotiated in the wake of the GM and Chrysler bankruptcies.

Over the past week, the UAW bureaucracy faced intense pressure from the auto bosses to ram the contract through. Following the defeat of the first Fiat Chrysler contract and the split vote on the GM contract, the UAW faced strong opposition at Ford, with “no” votes leading by midweek. No doubt many in corporate management were rethinking their continued patronage of the UAW under conditions in which the union seemed incapable of squelching a growing rank-and-file rebellion.

Given these conditions, the UAW opted to exert maximum pressure to get a “yes” vote.

Many workers question the decision by the UAW to shift the day of the vote by Local 600. The ballot had been originally set for November 17 and 18. By Monday, however, when it looked like the contract

might be rejected, the UAW suddenly changed the voting to conclude by November 20, making it the last unit to cast ballots.

Then on Wednesday, November 18 the UAW hastily convened a press conference at the Local 600 union hall to push for contract ratification. UAW Vice President Jimmy Settles warned workers that rejection of the contract might cost them their jobs or result in a long, fruitless and costly strike. Reporters from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* seeking entrance to the press conference were manhandled and ejected by UAW officials.(see video)

According to one report, Settles—who came up through the ranks of the UAW Local 600 bureaucracy—and other UAW leaders whipped local officials into line, threatening an end to their careers if they did not back the contract and aggressively campaign for ratification.

According to a source, workers on Monday morning filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board over the vote at Ford.

A tier-two worker at Dearborn Truck Plant said a lot of workers at his workplace questioned the integrity of the vote. “They were putting a lot of pressure to vote ‘yes,’ especially on the new people. I voted ‘no’ because it just doesn’t make sense to make people work for eight years to get top pay. That was egregious.

“I work on day shift. When the UAW saw that ‘no’ was leading they became extra aggressive. They were telling B shift, ‘If you don’t vote “yes” you won’t have a job.’ Louisville, Kansas City and Chicago all voted ‘no.’ Why would it be a landslide for ‘yes’ here? It’s not common sense. From everything I hear, I don’t see how Dearborn passed it.

“I believe they changed the dates of the vote because they wanted to determine first how many votes they needed. Also, I don’t understand why we put the ballots in a box instead of having the votes counted by machine like they do in national elections. The union was the one counting and collecting the ballots.”

Another Dearborn Truck tier-two worker said, “There was not one worker I came in contact with who said he wasn’t voting ‘no.’

“The UAW was threatening us with replacements. When I came in to vote the UAW officials were all yelling, ‘Do the right thing.’ I don’t think they have our best interests in mind. They know in order to survive they have to be in bed with Ford.”

There has been widespread talk of irregularities in the voting itself. The UAW has not responded to a blog report that UAW officials went around to workers on the line at Dearborn Truck pressuring them to vote ‘yes.’

A tier-two worker at Dearborn Stamping said, “After we found out the contract passed we couldn’t believe it. Especially if they are saying 74 percent voted in favor. At lunch break, out of 30-40 people who voted, only two said they were happy about it. Later I talked to 10 or 15 people, and only one was happy. No one I talked to wanted it.

“It seems it was going to pass regardless. Once the ballot box leaves the building we don’t know what happens. I think there should be a revote supervised by an outside party independent of Ford and the UAW. It should be done electronically, like it is done in the presidential elections.

“I think this was settled before anyone even started voting. I definitely wouldn’t agree to an eight-year wage progression to reach top scale. The union says it is about equality, but we didn’t get it. If you are making \$15 an hour and have a family you have to work two jobs.”

There were questions about the voting process at other plants besides the Dearborn complex. Earlier this month workers at Sterling Axle north of Detroit organized a protest outside the contract information meeting against the Ford deal. The contract established a new substandard pay progression for tier-two workers at the factory, in effect creating a third tier of lower-paid workers.

A senior worker at the Ford Sterling Axle plant

involved in the protest told the WSWS, “I am starting to feel like our union is organized crime. If they want the contract passed, they will get it passed.

“I can’t see how they had so many vote for the contract [at Local 600] and only 900 against. It sounds suspicious. I also heard they took the ballot boxes to people on the line. If you are working you should not be voting. If that happened, then the workers need to take action. I think there should be a revote. I am thinking they put extra votes in the ballot boxes.

“If 49 out of 100 voted ‘no,’ they have to see that people are unhappy. They never had a press conference during a vote before. Then they start threatening jobs—that is intimidation. That is not politically correct.”

The worker said she watched the video of the WSWS reporters being thrown out of the UAW press conference at UAW Local 600 in Dearborn last week. “They are strongarming people. If it is a press conference, everyone has the right to hear what is going on. They don’t want to hear everyone’s views. I am really upset about that.”



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