

Michigan autoworker files challenge to UAW-Ford 2015 contract vote

Eric London
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A skilled trades worker at Ford's Dearborn Truck plant at the Rouge complex in suburban Detroit is continuing with his challenge to the validity of last year's contract ratification vote at Ford.

The United Auto Workers secured ratification of the sellout agreement under highly suspicious circumstances. After the deal had been decisively rejected by workers at a number of large assembly plants the UAW at the last minute changed the date of the vote at the Rouge complex so that Local 600 would be the last to cast ballots. The decision meant that UAW officials knew exactly how many votes they needed at the local in order push the deal through nationally.

Jimmy Settles, UAW vice president for Ford and a former Local 600 executive, then called a highly unusual press conference in the midst of the vote. At the press conference, held at the UAW Local 600 union hall in Dearborn and from which *World Socialist Web Site* reporters were barred, Settles warned that rejection would lead to Ford eliminating jobs. The UAW also put the squeeze on local UAW reps, warning their positions were at stake if the contract failed.

At the conclusion of voting the UAW announced that a massive majority of Ford Rouge workers had voted in favor of the agreement, giving the contract a narrow overall margin of ratification around the country.

Following the vote, numerous allegations of irregularities surfaced, including intimidation and outright ballot stuffing. One Ford Rouge worker, Art Pedersen, filed a protest with UAW Local 600 in December, which was promptly rejected. He has since attempted to take up the matter with the International UAW, only to meet further stonewalling.

However, the evidence Pedersen presents of UAW vote rigging is damning. First, he explains that there were *exactly* 500 more votes cast on the national contract than the local contract, which was presented to workers at the same time.

Second, Pedersen cites a vote counter who noted that ballots were found folded up in bunches, indicating ballot stuffing.

Third, in his letter to Local 600, Pedersen writes, "there

were no Privacy Booths set up for the marking of the Ballots, the Ballots were not numbered and no signatures or initials were taken as the Voters names were crossed off the Membership list."

This prevented any oversight of the voting process and facilitated fraudulent photocopying of ballots. Pedersen's letter to the International UAW Executive Board points to the fact that autoworkers complained that UAW committeemen told them the UAW "needed the copier to make more ballots" as voting was taking place.

Fourth, Pedersen notes in his protest letter that "no outside, impartial firm was involved in the counting" and cited a UAW Public Review Board decision, which notes that "a UAW ratification process should not be conducted by the same bargaining committee that negotiated the contract."

Pedersen says in notes prepared for his challenge: "This statement was not adhered to during the recent Local 600 TA Ratification. There was not only Bargaining Reps involved with the process, but also, district committee were involved ... there was a member of the National Bargaining team present who was out of Michigan Assembly Plant, pitching the YES vote at the Ballot Bucket at the Skilled Trades Area."

In its letter explaining the rejection of Pedersen's protest Local 600 officials wrote, "We find there is no basis to your protest; the ratification vote was conducted pursuant to the language as it is set forth in the UAW Constitution."

Despite the rejection by the local, when Pederson attempted to take up the matter with the UAW International, the International Executive Board responded on February 19 by telling Pedersen that he had to again take it up with the local: "it has been determined that your attempt to appeal to this office is premature."

In their "Alice and Wonderland" treatment of Pedersen's claim, the UAW has three goals: (1) Get rid of Pedersen's protest, (2) prevent his allegations of fraud from being widely known, and (3) keep the assembly lines moving to keep churning out profits for Ford.

"They're stalling," Pedersen told the *World Socialist Web*

Site and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “And the whole contract ratification was chaotic, it was crazy.

“They want us to believe there were 500 people who voted yes for national and just threw away their local ballot,” he said. “There weren’t 500 people that just threw away their ballots. There weren’t even trashcans in the voting room to throw them away in! You would have seen them laying all over the floor. The bottom line is there were exactly 500 more national ballots in the buckets than local.”

“A bargaining committeeman watched them pull out folded bundles which could not have gone in individually,” he said.

Pedersen says his challenge should be taken up by the UAW’s Public Review Board, a four-person committee that is the final step for appeals against UAW practice.

“I have always thought of the PRB as an impartial third party,” Pedersen writes. “That being said, there are many cases that get ruled in favor of the IUAW, not based on the merits of the Appeal. ... So there you have it.”

Pedersen’s research also shows that “Going as far back to 1974 and before, the PRB has advised the UAW no less than six times to clarify the Ratification language in the Constitution.”

He notes that PRB has previously ruled that “The International Union has the authority and the flexibility to establish ratification procedures, even one which provides for ratification of a Supplement prior to its negotiation.”

Pedersen says, “I can only respond ‘WTF.’ Really, we are going to vote on something that has not been negotiated yet??? I am sure they made this clear at the Informational meeting! NOT!!!”

Pedersen told the *WSWS* that behind this is the UAW’s attempts to maintain a contract that will boost the company’s profit at the expense of autoworkers.

“There is no reason whatsoever that they should have negotiated an eight-year progression for new hires. No reason. They’re making the money and there ought to be a new contract.

“I want everyone equal. I’d like to see everybody get the opportunity to get pensions. The bottom line is in 2007 and four years ago production workers gave up 8 to 10 minutes of break time every day we work. That equals 120 extra trucks a week that they’re making above what we used to. They’re making plenty of money. Their story about this being the richest contract ever is not true.”

Pedersen has already received widespread support from workers in Dearborn.

“There has been a tremendous outpouring of workers saying to me, ‘What can we do to help?’ I was told to attend the Local 600 General Counsel meeting on March 7 at 4 p.m. First they wouldn’t even tell me when it was because

they told me I wasn’t supposed to attend. Now I’m being told I have to attend.”

The fraudulent means by which the UAW obtained ratification of the Ford agreement epitomizes the conspiratorial character of the entire contract negotiation process. It further illustrates that the UAW acts not as the representative of autoworkers, but a tool of the corporations and a vehicle to boost the income and privileges for the highly paid officials that staff its offices. The perks and six figure salaries of UAW President Dennis Williams, Jimmy Settles and other top officials are based on maintaining cozy relations with the auto companies, which they loyally serve.

The results of the 2015 negotiations were concession-ridden agreements tailored to the needs of the auto companies. The UAW concealed the impending attacks on jobs and working conditions that are inevitable as the world economic crisis deepens.

The UAW countered the mass opposition evoked by these sellouts through lies, intimidation and it appears outright fraud.

While Pedersen’s exposure of the corrupt practices of the UAW deserves the widest support and sympathy, workers should have no illusions in the UAW appeals process or that the union can be pressured into overturning the results of the contract vote. There is not an ounce of democracy in the UAW. Workers confront the reality of a gangster-ridden bureaucracy, impervious to the legitimate demands of rank-and-file autoworkers.

For this reason workers need to take the initiative in building truly democratic, rank-and-file factory committees to wage a struggle in defense of their interests.



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