

“We need to be paid back”

Autoworkers vote to strike, denounce UAW treachery ahead of contract deadline with GM, Ford and Chrysler

Our reporters
27 August 2019

American autoworkers are voting by lopsided margins to authorize strike action, in an expression of their determination to reverse four decades of concessions engineered by GM, Ford and Fiat-Chrysler and their United Automobile Workers (UAW) co-conspirators.

Voting continues at plants throughout the country today and Wednesday. But the results at plants that have already voted have been nearly unanimous in favor of a strike. These include Fiat-Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly (96 percent in favor) and Belvidere Assembly (94 percent), GM’s Tonawanda Powertrain (98 percent) and GM’s Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly (96 percent).

These last two are particularly significant. Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly, commonly known as Poletown, is one of the five GM plants slated for closure, and is currently slated to close its doors early next year. Orion Assembly was subjected to a secret memorandum of understanding signed by UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada that allowed the corporation to lay off full-time workers and replace them with low-paid contractors. Estrada is currently under investigation in the ongoing federal corruption probe of UAW officials who took money and perks under the table to sign pro-company contracts.

Workers at the Ford Rouge Complex in Dearborn spoke with reporters from the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter* over the weekend. Teams visited the Dearborn Truck Plant (DTP), AK Steel, Ford’s former Rouge Steel plant, and the Dearborn Diversified Manufacturing Plant (DDMP), where workers denounced the UAW for years of betrayals and corruption.

Many were angered by the lack of information forthcoming from the UAW just days before contract

expiration. Moreover, workers are anticipating that the new agreement will contain a massive attack on medical benefits, which has long been in the crosshairs of the companies.

A tier-two worker asked in disgust, “Why would I give up my health care? That is a benefit that we have had here at Ford for decades before I even got here. Why would I all of a sudden agree to that?”

“That is the rumor on the shop floor. By the end of this contract, we are going to be paying at least 20 percent, maybe 40 percent, of medical insurance costs.

“My whole family back to my grandfather worked at Ford. When I tell them the type of things that I deal with in relation to my union leadership, they kind of shake their heads in disgust with what it’s come to.”

Regarding demands for the contract he said, “I haven’t heard one bit on what is going on in negotiations—no paperwork, no reports. The union handed out a sheet saying, ‘Make your suggestions on what you want to see in the contract,’ then never gave us any feedback on anything that was proposed.

“Considering that the contract expires next month, I feel really left in the dark. How am I supposed to put down a ‘yes’ vote, or a ‘no’ vote, when I have no clue what we are even looking at?”

Emphasizing the importance of good health care in an increasingly brutal work environment, he continued, “They have people going out left and right from everyday, workday injuries, like carpal tunnel syndrome back injuries and sprains.

“I’ve seen people fall over from heat exhaustion and have to go to the hospital in an ambulance. You can work hard enough to pass out and have to go to the hospital. I

saw that happen to a young lady that is a TPT [temporary part time worker]. I don't even know if she has the insurance. So that's got to be twice as hard on her as it would be on me, so I feel for her.

“All the TPTs should have full pay and benefits. We are all in here sweating together. We all deserve to be treated the same. We should be getting the same pay check. We should be getting the same benefits. I am not sure how that ever was changed over the years, and it never should have happened.”

Two workers stopped in front of DTP to describe conditions in the plant. “Workers are not given proper breaks. We labor under very difficult conditions all day long. It doesn't matter if you are young or old, workers are treated like a piece of scrap metal.”

One said she takes 800 milligrams of Motrin every day. She knows it's bad for her body, but she needs something to get through the pain. Both denounced the alternative work schedule of 10 hours as a scam with the union to make a fortune for the Ford family and their stockholders.

“Instead of working a 40-hour week, we end up working as much as 58 hours. Most of the time we work 10 hours with no overtime pay. There is no concern for our betterment, our family life, or us. To get to the bathroom, you have to climb up a flight of stairs.

“I have seen women drag themselves up those stairs because they are in so much pain. I have seen people bring in two to three insoles for their shoes trying to protect their feet because you are standing on your feet for such a long time.”

During the Obama restructuring of GM and Chrysler, while Ford was not bailed out, she noted, “they got us to take big concessions. The union said we had to help them get through a difficult period. It's time to turn that around. They are now making gobs of money, and we need to be paid back.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact