

Opposition to GM deal grows as UAW rushes vote on sellout contract

Our reporters
21 October 2019

Opposition to the sellout deal with General Motors continues to grow as the United Auto Workers begins to rush through ratification votes today in hopes of shutting down the powerful five-week strike by 48,000 GM workers.

The deal announced by the UAW last Thursday betrays all the demands GM workers struck for. It allows for the shutting down of the Lordstown Assembly Plant and other factories, paving the way for a future wave of job cuts in the auto industry. The deal also maintains the hated two-tier wage and benefit system and allows for a vast expansion of temporary workers, the central demand of GM and its Wall Street backers.

The UAW is trying to bulldoze workers into accepting the new four-year deal through a combination of misinformation, a rush of votes before workers have sufficient time to study and discuss it and exploiting the economic distress workers caused by the starvation level strike pay the UAW forced them to subsist on.

The tentative agreement includes an \$11,000 signing bonus for full-time workers and \$4,500 for temps, confirming the adage of veteran workers that the “higher the signing bonus, the worse the deal.”

The 3,300 workers at the Spring Hill, Tennessee assembly plant, just south of Nashville, will be forced to vote today, right after UAW local and national officers hold informational meetings, euphemistically called “education sessions,” on the contract. Another 1,400 workers at the Toledo, Ohio Transmission plant are voting the day after their meetings held yesterday.

Workers at large assembly plants in Flint, Michigan; Wentzville, Missouri; Fairfax, Kansas; Arlington, Texas; Ft. Wayne, Indiana and other locations will be voting later in the week, with the UAW saying it wants the ratification process wrapped up by Friday.

At an informational meeting Sunday in Lansing, Michigan, large numbers of workers simply boycotted the

meeting, distrustful of anything UAW officials would say.

Supporters of the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* distributed the statement, “Vote no! Reject UAW misinformation! Elect rank-and-file committees to expand the strike!” that calls on workers to take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the UAW.

A number of UAW officials attempted to intimidate workers and prevent them from taking the statement or speaking to WSWs supporters. However, most workers took the statement and a number stopped to talk, despite interruptions by the UAW.

One worker was particularly angry by the UAW’s abandonment of the Lordstown, Ohio workers who are forced to transfer to plants in different states to keep their jobs. “We have people from Lordstown who have just started to arrive. They have had to move their families and kids.”

A 19-year-old temporary part-time workers (TPT) at first said he supported the contract. After the WSWs explained the details of the agreement, he said, “I see why they don’t broadcast the contract, because there would be an uproar. There would be issues via social media. I would love to be full time. It’s a necessity. The fact that I got this job was a blessing because I worked fast food at minimum wage.”

Referring to the *Autoworker Newsletter*’s call for GM workers to spread the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler, he said, “All workers together; I agree with, that’s brilliant. All of us coming together to fight these big companies. That’s what you need. It’s constantly said that there needs to be solidarity. If workers from these unions worked together, we would make better strides.”

Another TPT worker said, “These big companies want more money. They will do anything they can to make that money.” He agreed with expanding the strike. “If all the workers got together it would be stronger.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by striking workers

on the picket lines. A younger tier-two worker in front of the Detroit-Hamtramck plant said, "They call [UAW headquarters] Solidarity House, but I don't think they are in solidarity with us. Not the way they voted to bring back this contract. I see how they treated the Lordstown workers. If the UAW was for solidarity, they would help us continue the fight."

The UAW, he said, "leave us in the dark and don't tell us anything. We are out here every day. I think they used Detroit-Hamtramck as a bargaining tool," he said, adding that bringing an electric pickup truck to the plant, which was set to close in January, would only employ a few hundred workers "because there are less parts to assemble an electric vehicle. I don't see job security in this contract."

As for the requirement that full-time temps must work a "consecutive" three years before they are converted to full-time regular workers, he said, "Can you imagine what GM can do over a three-year time period? They have to work three consecutive years. On paper it may look good, but how likely is that to happen? You get laid off continuously."

"Having been a temp myself I know how it feels. All temps should be hired in now, in this contract," he said.

The worker expressed skepticism that any vote counting conducted by the UAW would be legitimate. "Even if the majority says 'no,' who knows if it will be defeated?"

Pointing to the growing wave of workers struggles, such as the strike by 30,000 Chicago teachers and support staff, he said, "They want to get us back because the momentum is building up, and it will go nationally and even internationally. Look at Mexico," he said referring to the solidarity action by GM workers in Silao, Mexico who refused overtime in support of the US GM workers and have faced victimizations and firings.

Amy, a legacy worker at the Fort Wayne Assembly Plant shared her thoughts on the sellout agreement. "I know that for the legacy workers, the union isn't giving us anything better than in the last contract, but I would have to hear from the temps what they think before I really give my opinion. This agreement, as it is, guarantees that temp workers will never be hired as full employees; the company can hire someone for less than two years and then lay them off for thirty days, which is a scheme they have used before. There used to be a 90-day probation period for new employees in which the company would lay workers off after 89 days."

"There are temps who have been in the plant for almost two years, and they should be rolled over, but in this

agreement, there is no guarantee for that. The contract uses the term 'as benefits the needs of the company' like they did in the previous contracts, so that really shows something. The whole thing is written in the company's interest."

Amy echoed the skepticism of other workers toward the character of the contract negotiations led by the UAW officials who have been charged with corruption. "I am very concerned that our International UAW President Gary Jones is involved in these negotiations. In my opinion, he should not be allowed to negotiate anything since he's being investigated for corruption. Not only did the UAW misuse our union dues, they misused money that was supposed to be used to benefit us [from the strike fund and training centers]."

Amy said the capitalist system has failed workers. "My son and his wife lost their house in the past year and had to move in with me, so in order to help support them I was not able to save up enough money to supplement the strike pay. You would think that with two incomes from union-employed people in the house that we could support everyone, but we can't make ends meet. I think that we all really need to fight against the government about this."

Autoworkers must mobilize now to defeat the contract and prepare to extend the strike to Ford, Fiat Chrysler and beyond. This will require the formation of rank-and-file factory committees to take the struggle out of the hands of the UAW. At the same time, workers must fight all attempts to rush through the votes, demanding a full week to review and discuss the deal. To prevent a repeat of 2015 when workers charged the UAW with ballot stuffing, there must be rank-and-file oversight over the voting process.



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