

Spring Hill, Tennessee workers reject deal, as UAW pushes GM sellout contract

Jerry White
22 October 2019

On Thursday, October 24 at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online strike update call. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

In the first vote held at a large General Motors facility on the four-year deal accepted by the United Auto Workers union, workers at the Spring Hill, Tennessee assembly plant defeated the sellout, with 51 percent of production workers voting “No.”

The vote is a blow to the UAW, which is holding a quick succession of tightly controlled “educational sessions” on the deal and ratification votes in hopes of shutting down the five-week strike by 48,000 GM workers on the company’s terms before workers are able to study the full agreement and rally opposition.

After local union officials voted to back the deal last week, a UAW press spokesman cynically claimed that the UAW was a “democratic organization” whose members made the final decision on the agreement. But the UAW’s attitude to the democratic will of the rank and file was on display in Monday morning, when Local 1853 union bureaucrats in Spring Hill called the police on workers campaigning for the defeat of the deal.

A worker who videoed the incident denounced local union president Tim Stannard and the UAW as stooges of GM. “I want everyone to think about it; a president calling the police on his own constituents... What’s that say about defending your rights inside the plant?” Another worker demanded: “What do they do for us? [Ignore] our grievances! ... They are dividing and conquering us [with outsourcing]!”

Inside the meeting, temps, in-progression workers and legacy workers peppered the local and national union officials with questions, especially about future plant closings and layoffs as well as the bogus

“pathway” for temps to become full-timers. Under the terms accepted by the UAW, only some temps will qualify to be converted if they work three “consecutive years,” without being laid off for more than 30 days. In the likely case they are laid off during that period, the three-year clock will start again.

Stannard and other union officials who defended the contract were met with derision by workers, while temps and others who spoke out against the sellout were applauded. One Spring Hill worker said the meeting was a continuation of a process in which workers “do not have a voice,” but predicted that workers would vote down the agreement.

Another Spring Hill worker who spoke to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* debunked the spurious claim by UAW Local 1853 officials that workers campaigning against the contract within 100 feet of the union hall had violated Tennessee’s law barring campaigning too close to a voting booth. Stannard, she said, “has always been somewhat ugly with people that don’t agree with him. Everyone has the right to know [what’s in the contract]! I have been on an election committee and I know there are rules, but it pertains to having materials inside the voting area! It was wrong!” she said, about the UAW calling the police on workers.

The tentative agreement is a betrayal of everything autoworkers have fought for. It sanctions the closure of the Lordstown plant and three other facilities, continues the two-tier wage and benefit system and paves the way for GM to hire a workforce that is made up almost exclusively of low-paid temporary and contract workers.

Because the UAW anticipates deep opposition, it has held snap elections at some smaller locations and other sites where local officials felt they could browbeat workers into accepting the contract. The aim is to create

a sense that the passage of the deal is all but inevitable and opposition is therefore hopeless.

As of Monday night, the UAW reported that engineers at the Warren Tech Center, which has been decimated by UAW-sanctioned layoffs, and transmission workers in Saginaw, Michigan had voted for the deal by 75 percent, and that it had also passed at the transmission plant in Toledo, Ohio, although results have not been posted.

On Monday, the UAW announced that the vote at the Lordstown plant, which was originally scheduled for Wednesday, would be postponed until Thursday because of an alleged threat that was made to the international UAW headquarters. While the UAW claimed this was being done as a safety precaution, local police acknowledged that no threats had been made locally.

The UAW's abandonment of the Lordstown plant has no doubt generated deep anger for tens of thousands of workers in an area already devastated by decades of deindustrialization and the opioid crisis. In another slap in the face to workers, it was reported yesterday that the UAW plans to withdraw its lawsuit against the closure of the plant, which was filed last year claiming GM's announcement violated the 2015 contract.

Whether or not a threat was actually made, the result of the postponement means the UAW will delay what it views as a likely smashing rejection of the contract by Lordstown workers, which could shift the momentum of the vote towards rejection.

While the corporate media has aided the UAW in concealing the truth about the contract, some media outlets have expressed fear that rank-and-file workers will reject it. CNBC wrote Monday: "Membership approval of such a deal has traditionally been a sure thing; however, Fiat Chrysler workers four years ago voted down an initial leadership-approved contract and sent negotiators back to the bargaining table. That's worrying both company executives and union leaders during this year's negotiations."

After the defeat of the 2015 contract, the cable business news channel noted, the UAW was criticized for underestimating the influence of social media and responded by hiring the "influential public relations firm BerlinRosen to help the union communicate its message with workers—specifically on social media." In fact, the chief task of the New York City PR firm was

to counter the influence of the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*, which emerged as a center of opposition with rank-and-file workers circulating its articles and statements tens of thousands of times.

This time, CNBC said, the UAW has hired at least one outside firm, SKDKnickerbocker, and over the weekend it started its social media campaign by posting messages praising the deal. "It's really important," Kristin Dziczek, vice president of industry, labor and economics at the corporate-aligned Center for Automotive Research told CNBC. "Misinformation spreads like wildfire. They're going to want to be on top of that stuff."

In the meantime, articles in the *Detroit Free Press* and the *New York Times* worriedly speculated that Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers could be the next to strike, particularly because the other companies might demand even more egregious concessions from workers, especially on health care.

Autoworkers must counter the propaganda campaign by the UAW and be on guard against efforts to repeat the experience of 2015 when workers said the UAW used outright vote-rigging and fraud to ram through the agreement at Ford by a razor thin "majority" of 51-49 percent.

This means building up the opposition by forming rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, to communicate and coordinate opposition to this sellout. But the defeat of the deal is only the beginning. The UAW cannot be pressured to bring back anything better. Workers must take the conduct of the strike into their own hands. What is needed is the expansion of the strike to Ford, Fiat Chrysler and beyond. Autoworkers must unite with other striking workers at Mack Truck, the Chicago Public Schools and the Arizona and Texas copper mines and unify US autoworkers with workers in Mexico, Canada and internationally to beat back the global corporate assault on the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact