

Who is counting the ballots for the UAW-GM contract?

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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.

After the United Auto Workers announced last week that local union officials had endorsed its sellout agreement with General Motors, a UAW press spokesman claimed that the union is a democratic organization whose members had the final say on whether to ratify or reject the deal. “Our members will make this decision. It is their contract. It is in their hands.”

The entire process the UAW has used to get its deal ratified, however, has been anything but democratic.

The *Detroit Free Press* posted an article Tuesday, “Here’s how the UAW-GM ratification process works and what members are voting on,” that revealed several important facts, including:

1. The voting is scheduled and run by UAW local election committees.
2. The local UAW halls use paper ballots.
3. The local UAW’s election committees count the ballots and report it to the international.
4. The local election committees police themselves.
5. There’s no overall audit of the vote.

In other words, there is absolutely no rank-and-file oversight of the voting process and nothing to prevent the UAW from committing vote fraud, stuffing the ballot or distorting the voting results.

Workers have every reason to be skeptical about the legitimacy of the voting process. The agreement revealed last week is a betrayal of everything workers have struck over for nearly six weeks. It accepts the closure of the Lordstown assembly plant and three other facilities. It not only retains the hated two-tier wage and benefit system; it also creates a whole new

layer of tiers. The agreement opens the way for GM to hire an unlimited amount of at-will temporary workers and third-party contract workers.

Outside the informational meeting in Flint Tuesday, one young temporary worker denounced the deal for depriving him and thousands of other so-called part-time temps of any chance of getting a full-time job. “The UAW is supposed to defend us, but they own millions of GM shares. If they collect \$40 a month in dues from 1,500 temporary workers at my plant, that’s \$480,000 from workers they don’t have to represent.”

Knowing that it will face immense opposition, the UAW has hired the Washington, DC public relations firm SKDKnickerbocker to launch a social media propaganda blitz and counter the efforts by rank-and-file workers to expose the truth about the agreement.

Within a few days of dumping the 351-page contract on the internet, the UAW began a quick succession of “informational meetings” (dubbed “educational sessions”) and snap votes on the agreement, giving workers virtually no time to study and discuss it, let alone organize opposition to defeat it.

The real attitude of the UAW to the democratic rights of its members was demonstrated by the actions of local union officials in Spring Hill, Tennessee who called the police to threaten rank-and-file workers calling for a “no” vote outside the union hall. The UAW has used the same methods against those distributing the statement by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calling for the rejection of the deal and the formation of rank-and-file committees to expand the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

Despite the intimidation, Spring Hill workers rejected the contract. In its official count, however, the UAW said the deal was only defeated by a 51-49 percent margin, with 1,527 production workers voting to reject

it and 1,486 voting to ratify the deal. Given the enormous opposition to the deal, which was only multiplied after local officials called the police on workers exercising their right to free speech, these figures must be treated with suspicion.

Faced with angry and distrustful workers at the Spring Hill local, the UAW could not simply claim the deal had passed. But there is no reason to accept the UAW's claim that the deal was rejected by only a small margin of 41 workers.

As always, the UAW is manipulating the order of the voting to achieve the desired results.

Anticipating it will face large "no" votes at the largest factories, the UAW organized to hold the first votes at relatively smaller locals. Their aim is to create a "narrative" that the contract will be passed, in an effort to isolate and discourage opponents. As of this writing, the UAW has reported that 2,776 workers have voted "Yes" and 1,936 have voted "No."

According to the UAW, the ratification of a national contract requires 50% of the total members, "plus 1" member. What matters for the UAW in the end is the number of "yes" votes, even if some plants are acknowledged to have voted against it—by the slimmest of margins.

On Monday, the UAW International suddenly announced that it was moving the vote at the Lordstown plant, originally scheduled for Wednesday, to Thursday, the same day as the "rollout meeting." The postponement, the media reported, was due to a threat supposedly made against the international union headquarters in Detroit.

It is now clear the reports of a threat, which presumably came from Solidarity House, never occurred. "Despite some media reports that the UAW Local 1112 at Lordstown, Ohio, had to reschedule its vote because of a threat, that is untrue, said Tim O'Hara, Local 1112 president," the *Detroit Free Press* reported Tuesday.

Having sanctioned the shutdown of the plant in the contract, the UAW expects a near unanimous vote to reject the sellout deal. Hoping to prevent such a landslide vote from encouraging workers at other plants, the UAW switched Lordstown to the end of the voting process.

Workers have gone through this before. In 2015, Ford workers charged that the UAW was involved in direct

ballot stuffing. With the contract being defeated by large margins nationally, the UAW moved the vote at the Dearborn complex in suburban Detroit to the end of the voting schedule. Then after the vote at the Dearborn Truck Plant, the UAW declared that the deal had magically passed by just enough votes to allow it to pass nationally by a razor-thin majority of 51-49 percent.

Dearborn workers demanded an investigation and accused UAW Local 600 officials of printing hundreds of ballots without numbers on them, not having proper membership lists to cross-check who voted and ignoring workers' demands for a recount.

Workers said union officials collected ballots in trash cans and could not account for hundreds of ballots with "yes" votes, which were mysteriously folded together inside the trash cans like they had just come out of a copy machine. An official complaint to the UAW Public Review Board was rejected with the specious argument that overturning the bogus vote "would disenfranchise the members who voted to ratify the agreement and thereby violate the very democratic practices we are charged with preserving."

The fact that the UAW says it will release the vote tallies Friday at 4:00 pm even though the votes will not be completed at major plants like Arlington, Texas; Ft. Wayne, Indiana and Orion and Delta townships in Michigan until Friday, as late as noon, only underscores the fraudulence of the voting process. As far as the UAW is concerned, it plans to announce a "yes" vote come hell or high water.

The UAW has every motive to rig the vote. Workers have every motive to prevent this. But this can only be done if workers elect rank-and-file committees to oversee the vote. This should be combined with a campaign to defeat this sellout and to win the strike by expanding it to Ford, Fiat Chrysler and throughout the auto parts industry.



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