

UAW rams through sellout, shuts down strike at General Motors

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After a week-long balloting process marked by intimidation, lies and dubious balloting procedures, the United Auto Workers declared on Friday that its sellout agreement with General Motors had been ratified by GM workers.

The shutdown of the strike, the longest national walkout in the American auto industry in 50 years, exposes the UAW as an agent of corporate management, organically hostile to the interests of autoworkers.

The sellout at General Motors is the greatest warning to workers at Ford and Fiat Chrysler, who are next in line in the UAW's "pattern bargaining" process. The UAW announced on Friday that it had selected Ford as its next "target" company. Ford is already demanding even deeper cuts than General Motors, in particular to healthcare.

The treachery of the UAW is also a warning to 3,500 workers at Mack-Volvo Truck whose strike was abruptly shut down this week by the UAW after it announced a tentative agreement. The UAW felt compelled to keep workers on strike during balloting at General Motors. At Mack Truck, it shut the strike before even releasing details of the tentative agreement, making clear it is moving even more aggressively to force through concessions at the heavy truck manufacturer.

"General Motors members have spoken," UAW-GM Vice President Terry Dittes said with consummate cynicism in an official statement. "We are all so incredibly proud of UAW-GM members who captured the hearts and minds of a nation. Their sacrifice and courageous stand addressed the two-tier wages structure and permanent temporary worker classification that has plagued working class Americans."

In fact, the the ~~four~~ unrestricted replacement of senior workers with temps, who will be strung out with bogus promises of a "pathway" to regular employment, while the UAW makes its bid to serve as a temp agency for the auto companies. Through the development of new labor-management bodies and the maintenance of existing ones, the UAW will be, even more than before, jointly responsible with GM for a total restructuring of the workforce towards part-time, casual work.

Such was the determination of the UAW to force through the contract and end the strike that workers at Flint Truck Assembly were sent online notices by the local to return to work on Saturday even before balloting had ended nationwide.

None of the vote totals can be taken at face value, given that the UAW already demonstrated its willingness to stuff the ballot in 2015 at Ford. The passage of the contract by wide margins at several larger locals is in obvious contradiction to the widespread opposition to the contract, particularly over the virtually unrestricted exploitation of temps and the ratification of plant closures.

At Flint Truck Assembly, where 30 percent of the workforce are temps, workers allegedly voted 60-40 in favor the contract. Yet only an hour to the west, workers at Lansing Delta Township rejected the contract by an almost equally large margin.

At other plants, the margin in favor was absurdly wide, such as at Arlington Assembly where the contract allegedly passed by 76 percent. Meanwhile, at Spring Hill, Tennessee the "no" vote carried by only a few dozen votes, and massive rejections at Lockport, Rochester, and other smaller locals were not enough to overcome the inflated "yes" votes.

The UAW also exploited the economic distress

among strikers, which it itself caused by limiting workers to \$250 per week strike pay. Workers who spoke to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* during the balloting expressed concern that temporary workers in particular were being pressured to accept the deal because it included a \$4,500 signing bonus for temps.

However, in the final analysis, the union gambled that, in spite of massive opposition to the contract, autoworkers did not see a way forward once it became clear that the union was determined to force through all of GM's demands. Undoubtedly, many workers who opposed the contract voted "yes" or abstained because they knew that the UAW would punish workers if they rejected the deal by stringing them out for several more weeks before making them vote on the same contract again.

At the same time, the strike demonstrated the determination of autoworkers to fight back in defense of living standards for the entire working class.

Particularly significant was the groundswell of support and solidarity between American autoworkers and their class brothers and sisters throughout the world. This was demonstrated in particular by the courageous stand taken by the Silao 9, Mexican GM workers who were fired for refusing to increase production during the strike.

On the picket lines, there was widespread support among American workers for the reinstatement of their Mexican brothers and sisters, in spite of union attempts to divide them by promoting "America-first" protectionism.

While the strike is over, the struggle of autoworkers in a very real sense is just beginning. The very concessions that the UAW has forced through will generate massive opposition. A younger generation of hyper-exploited workers entering the plants as temps will be thrust into struggle by the impossible conditions in which they find themselves.

And, of course, the UAW now begins the process of trying to ram through the same deal or worse at Ford and Fiat-Chrysler.

Autoworkers must draw the lessons from the strike. The UAW operated from the start with a strategy for defeat. It called the strike to wear workers down in order to force through the agreement which it had long worked out in advance with GM. As long as the strike remained under the control of the corrupt UAW, a

sellout was the only possible outcome.

To fight back, autoworkers must build new organizations, rank-and file-factory committees, democratically controlled by the ranks and built in conscious opposition to the union apparatus. Against the nationalist, pro-capitalist stance of the UAW, which defends the "right" of the auto companies to make a profit and supports wage cuts to keep the "American" industry competitive against its foreign rivals, these committees must be guided by an international strategy of uniting workers from every country on the basis of their common interests.

Moreover, the workers in these committees must take as their point of departure an understanding that their fight is not simply against greedy individual companies, but the capitalist system as a whole, which is based on exploitation and is the basic source of inequality, war, poverty and every other social ill.



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