“I really don’t believe it… It was so shady”

Workers question legitimacy of UAW’s claims on GM contract ratification

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Bitterness and anger are brewing after the UAW shut down the 40-day strike by 48,000 General Motors workers and announced the ratification of a concessions contract sanctioning the closure of four facilities and opening the door to a vast expansion of super-exploited temporary workers.

In a statement released Friday afternoon, the UAW claimed 23,389 members voted “yes” and 17,501 voted “no” on the contract. The massive “no” vote is a devastating verdict on the UAW, even if one accepts the authenticity of the totals.

The UAW posted a statement dripping with hypocrisy from President Gary Jones. “Their sacrifice and courageous stand addressed the two-tier wages structure and permanent temporary worker classification that has plagued working class Americans,” Jones said.

In fact, the contract contains no limit on the use of temporary workers while maintaining the hated two-tier wage structure and in effect creating new multiple tiers among temp workers.

The 40-day strike was the longest in the US auto industry since the 67-day walkout in 1970. Unlike that struggle, the just completed strike resulted in significant concessions.

Workers at a number of factories defeated the contract by wide margins, including the Lordstown Assembly Plant, (412 “no” and 60 “yes”) closed under the new contract and the Rochester, New York GM Components Holding facility, formerly Delphi (83 percent “no”). The contract was defeated by an overall 58 percent margin at the Lansing Delta Township facility.

There was a close vote at the GM Spring Hill Assembly Plant, where production workers (according to UAW figures) voted by 1,527 “no” to 1,486 “yes”. The UAW Local 1853 leadership called police on workers campaigning outside the union hall for rejection of the contract. At the massive Fort Wayne Assembly Plant, Local 2209 reported a razor-thin margin (50.8% yes 49.1% no) in favor of ratification. Actual vote totals at that plant were not released.

Local UAW officials claimed the contract was ratified by relatively wide margins at several plants where there was substantial opposition, including the Arlington, Texas Assembly Plant, the Wentzville, Missouri facility and the Flint Michigan Truck Assembly.

Several workers at the GM Wentzville Assembly outside St. Louis, where the UAW claimed the agreement passed by 63.5 percent among production workers, said they didn’t believe the tallies were legitimate.

“I really don’t believe it,” said a temporary worker who’s worked there for several years. “Other workers are saying they don’t believe it.”

A senior worker with several decades at the plant raised questions about the balloting process and the ease with which the UAW could have falsified the vote. “The way they had those pencils on that table with little slips of paper in a raggedy cardboard box to put them in....hell no.”

Adding that the ballots were unnumbered, she continued, “They had enough time to get legit ballots and a locking ballot box. It was so shady.”

“The largest concerns for most I believe was temporary employees being hired in and the ending of wage tiers,” a veteran worker at Fort Wayne Assembly told the WSWS *Autoworkers Newsletter*. He confirmed that there are over 700 temporary workers at the plant.

While the contract appeared to address the issue of temporary workers and tier two workers, he said, “it doesn't address the immediate hiring of temps who should be hired [as permanent] nor address that the company can basically fire a temp at any time over a few small infractions, meaning if they don't walk a tight rope for three years they won’t have a job.”

Reflecting on the reported narrow “yes” vote, he added, “It wouldn't surprise me if anyone in leadership used threats to intimidate workers into voting ‘yes.’ That whole plant is run off of intimidation from both the company and the union. The only thing that happened at the information meetings is a lot of misinformed members being more misinformed.”

He noted that the contract used language referring to “manufacturing employees” in the section dealing with wage increases. He said that led “me to believe that in the future it will probably only be employees directly on the manufacturing assembly line making the $32.32 per hour wage. I believe they intend to outsource things like subassembly work and material

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handling in the future."

A worker from the now closed Lordstown Assembly Plant said he agreed with those who felt suspicious about the announced vote totals. "I felt that would happen as well, but my opinion was to just stay out because we were already getting pennies on the dollar."

Asked what he thought were the lessons of this latest betrayal by the UAW, he said, "I think the UAW was scared of the workers not supporting them [because of] of the indictments being handed down. And I also believe [UAW President] Gary Jones should not have had his hand in this."

At the General Motors CCA parts distribution center in Burton, Michigan, workers voted heavily against the contract (571 to 340).

A young temp worker at the facility told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, "We are not treated fairly by the union or the company. The $250—then $275 [strike pay]—was a slap in the face while the UAW is sitting on top of lots of money. The contract is almost the same that was offered in the beginning. They let us suffer; tried to make us desperate. At the end of the day, maybe we broke even."

Remarking on the stipulation that temporary workers must wait three years to become full time he said, "It will now take eight years [for second tier workers] to become permanent, and our top pay will only be $25 an hour. This is BS. We're supposed to be brothers and sisters, but where's the solidarity? The production workers at Flint Truck Assembly can make up to $32 an hour. We're not all equal in this contract. And, the $32 is more than we'll ever make but it's not enough. We all got screwed.

"The temps now have four tiers: Flex-temps work 32 hours/week; part-time temps work at least 32 hours but not more than 40; permanent temps work 40 hours or more per week and overtime is mandatory. A fourth tier is called 'summer part-temps.'"

Ben, another worker from Flint Assembly, told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, "I voted 'no' on the contract. But many workers at the plant don't yet realize how bad it will be. That's because Flint is one of the last plants in which the tier system hasn't done significant damage. But they recently built a new body shop, so it's only a matter of time before the old shop will be filled with non-scale workers."

Reflecting on the strike he said, "This experience was totally surreal. The UAW starved the strikers out. We were underprepared for this kind of action, both financially and informationally. The $250 per week strike pay was a joke. There was $750 million in the fund, but $250 per week was all we got. It was useless.

"We didn't win anything from this contract. But we did have the ability to actually make gains for ourselves from the strike. As I understand it, we should have been hitting the company hard in order to get what we needed. But we didn't even know what was on the table.

"Instead the UAW was allowing us to blow off some steam while trying to take attention away from its corruption scandal. The result was that nobody striking really even knew what we were demanding.

"We were intentionally kept in the dark. No information was passed out. It was like the union put us out to the front lines of battle without any weapons. I even watched the company ship cars from our plant while we were striking, completely undermining us.

"Just yesterday, management was telling us that we had to go be prepared to go back to work by Friday. Why is management even talking to us when the contract vote hadn't even been ratified yet?"

A veteran worker at the Fiat Chrysler Jeep complex in Toledo said that he felt all autoworkers should have been joined together in a common struggle. Expressing his reaction to the vote announcement he said, "It was choreographed. They were giving $250 a week in strike pay and you had temporary workers and younger workers living paycheck to paycheck who could not afford to be on strike for any length of time."

He said the concessions contained in the contract made him wince. "If you look at the sacrifices that were made by workers in the 1930s, to give those gains back for a $4,500 signing bonus... After the UAW gets its cut and they take out taxes all that's left is a couple of grand."

He said that the green light given by the UAW to the unlimited hiring of temporary workers in the GM contract was a watershed. "These are the last days of the UAW. It is in the process of disintegration. Soon there will be no more full-time workers, just temporaries.

"History will repeat itself. Just look at the 1930s. Workers will have to form another union or some other organization. Factory jobs will be like McDonalds or Wal-Mart. The management doesn't care about quality, just money; more production and meeting their numbers."

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