Chicago Ford workers denounce UAW contract: “They want to monitor you every minute, every second”

Marcus Day
11 November 2019

Voting by 55,000 Ford autoworkers continues this week on a pro-company tentative agreement backed by the United Auto Workers, with the results to be announced Friday evening.

The deal is “patterned” on the contract between the UAW and General Motors, which the union was only able to ram through after isolating a 40-day-long strike by GM workers, starving them on $250-275 a week in strike pay.

Like the GM deal, the Ford contract sanctions the closure of a factory—the Romeo Engine plant—which the company reportedly did not demand until the GM plant closures were formally announced. The agreement also maintains the multi-tier wage and benefit system and opens the door to a massive expansion of temporary workers.

Ominously, the contract would allow video monitoring of workstations and unnamed “motion tracking systems,” enabling Ford to deploy the high-tech surveillance methods increasingly perfected by Amazon and other corporate giants to increase the exploitation of workers.

A second-tier worker at the Chicago Assembly Plant told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, “I’m against that. They already have cameras on the job. They’re supposed to be watching the cars, so we turn them away from us. You can’t concentrate on doing your job right and safely if you are being constantly watched. They want to monitor you every minute, every second to ensure that there is zero downtime.

“From the last screw to the next job, they want you moving constantly. They want us to work like machines but we’re human. Even their machines break down; what will this do to us? The logic is, it would kill us. It’s amazing, they want to work us to death. It’s going back to the days of slavery, when you are watched constantly and they cracked the whip if you slowed down.”

At Ford, workers initially expressed their opposition to the deal with a nearly two-thirds “no” vote at Chicago Assembly, in a stinging rebuke to the UAW. However, the union has deliberately scheduled some of the largest locals at the end of the voting period, such as the massive Kentucky Truck and Louisville Assembly plants, which together employ over 12,000 workers. Union officials are fearful of momentum building for a rejection of its deal with Ford and are using lies and intimidation—such as the bullying reported at a meeting in Local 600 in Dearborn—in an attempt to force through the contract.

Over the last several days, the UAW has announced “yes” votes at the Michigan Assembly Plant, Flat Rock Assembly Plant, Chicago Stamping, Van Dyke Transmission and Livonia Transmission. Many of the reported totals have indicated low turnout, however, with large numbers of workers abstaining in disgust, having little belief that the corrupt UAW would honestly recognize a “no” vote or respond to it with a better proposal.

UAW President Gary Jones announced he was taking a leave of absence over a week ago, with the federal corruption investigation expected to result in his indictment for embezzling union funds in the near future. UAW-Ford Vice President Rory Gamble has been named interim president and claimed that the union is implementing various toothless “reform” measures, which have little chance of convincing anyone that the UAW is no longer in the pocket of the

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companies.

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions: The UAW is an enforcer for corporate management, and new organizations democratically controlled by autoworkers themselves are needed. Workers must act to form rank-and-file factory committees at Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler in order to stop the UAW-company attacks and launch a real fight for workers' interests.

Reporters for the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with workers at the Chicago Stamping and Chicago Assembly plants over the weekend and encountered widespread opposition to the contract.

"Ford is taking from us contract after contract," said the second-tier worker. "Every little thing they say we get is paid for by taking more away from us. We voted down the contract here, but they are trying to get it passed in other plants. They're giving signing bonuses to the temps to get them to support it. But Ford knows what it is doing, they're never going to hire in the temps.

"We see the corruption of the UAW, but the scariest thing is what they do behind closed doors. The union is led by people facing criminal charges who should be in some jail cell for what they did on behalf of Ford and the other companies."

One veteran Chicago Stamping worker said the UAW was becoming "a temp agency" and that it is "in bed with the company." Commenting on how the contract gives new powers to the UAW to determine which temporary workers get rolled over to full-time positions, he said, "With all the abuse of workers the UAW carries out, the last thing I would tell my daughter is to come here for a job."

Robert, another worker at the Chicago Stamping plant, said, "I think it takes too much time to get to full time pay. Whatever raise we are getting it's not enough to cover the rising cost of living. They're giving a $3,200 lump sum bonus in the first year for [skilled trades] workers and a $2,700 bonus to [production workers], but I don't qualify for either of those because I have been working at Ford for less than a year."

Chris said TPTs who don't have 90 days on the job would not get the $3,500 signing bonus. Those just rolled over who haven't got 90 days as full-timers wouldn't get the full-time bonus either. "They got played," he said.

A young TPT stamping worker with two months on the job said, "Some of the TPTs are only getting four hours a week. You can't live on a $300 paycheck." Commenting on the Chicago teachers strike, she said, "There are 45 kids in classrooms. They are low-balling teachers and low-balling us. In order for there to be rich people, we've got to be broke."

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter *is holding its next online meeting Thursday at 7 p.m. Eastern Time to discuss how to oppose the UAW's pro-company conspiracies and fight for workers' interests. To register, go to wsws.org/autocall*

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