

Ford workers describe UAW's intimidation tactics to pass Ford contract

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Voting on the sellout contract at Ford continues this week at plants throughout the country, with a final tally expected by late Friday. At present, the UAW and the corporate media are boasting that the contract is on its way to being passed. However, there has been a heavy “no” vote—roughly 42 percent, according to an analysis of vote totals by *Automotive News*—and workers at several major factories where widespread opposition is expected, including in Louisville, Kentucky and Dearborn, Michigan are still voting.

To the extent that the vote results can be believed—there is no independent oversight of the balloting, and the UAW is widely believed to have stuffed the ballot at Ford in 2015—it is not an indication of wide support for the contract. In all essentials, the deal mirrors the concessions forced through at General Motors, including laying the groundwork for the conversion of large sections of the workforce into low-wage temps.

A prominent feature of the voting so far is the widespread abstention rate at many major plants. Fifty-four percent of workers at Chicago Assembly declined to cast a ballot—those who did voted it down. Abstention rates were 37 percent at Michigan Assembly and 35 percent at Kansas City Assembly.

The results are a vote of no confidence in the United Auto Workers union. Workers know that, even if they vote down the contract, the UAW will refuse to bring back a better deal. If it does decide to call a strike at Ford, it will only be in order to starve workers into submission in order to ensure the contract's passage, as happened with the 40-day strike at General Motors.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls for workers to vote down the contract. But this by itself is not sufficient. The way forward for Ford workers is to form rank-and-file factory committees to

take the initiative out of the hands of the UAW, which is fully integrated with the companies as an arm of management. Autoworkers should demand that these committees should have oversight of the contract vote to prevent any attempts by UAW officials to stuff the ballot. In opposition to the corporate dictatorship which the UAW and Ford are seeking to perfect through the use of pervasive camera networks to spy on workers, these committees will establish the framework for genuine industrial democracy, including workers' control of line speed and safety.

These committees should begin preparing the groundwork for a national strike at both Ford and Fiat Chrysler. In opposition to the UAW's nationalism, these committees should establish lines of communication with other sections of autoworkers throughout the world, who are facing the same attacks. In particular, they should demand the immediate reinstatement of the Silao Nine, Mexican GM workers fired for supporting the strike in the United States.

The UAW bureaucracy has been explicitly threatening workers with economic hardship if they vote “no.” “One thing that has been happening a lot at the Kansas City plant—and I'm sure all of the others—is that committeemen have been going around telling members that if they vote it down the [International UAW] will take them out on strike for 45 days and then send back exactly the same contract,” one Kansas City worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

“So basically, rather than using a strike as a bargaining tool against the company, they're using it to bully the workers. Another thing they've been telling them over on the truck side of the plant is that if they vote it down, Ford will eliminate a shift.

“All of that started as soon as the IUAW rep showed up,” he continued. “Imagine that. I heard a few months

ago that Gary Jones [then the UAW Region 5 Director] was in the plant during the 2015 contract vote doing the same thing, as was Jimmy Settles at the plants in Michigan.”

The autoworker, who spoke with the WSWs before balloting took place at Kansas City, said he would be voting “no.” “I won’t be bullied. [There are] some very deceptive things in the contract that aren’t getting a lot of notice regarding the temp language.”

For example, “The highlight sheet gives the appearance that all temps will be allowed to work a full week all year around. That is not the case. When you read the actual white book, it states that there will be [Temporary Part-Time and Temporary Full-Time classifications] and that only select temps will be surveyed to see if they want to work a full week. [This is] very similar to the STS [Short-Term Supplemental Employees] program they have for four months out of the year. A few temps were allowed to work the full week, while most were not.

“They try to sell this as something they ‘won’ but that is actually exactly what the company wanted all along. It’s a pain in their ass to have to cover gaps left by temps only being allowed to work certain days and it means they have to have more temps and therefore pay for more health benefits.

“Also not spoken of is how they covertly actually ceded even more ground to Ford [on the use of temps] while pretending they won another big battle. The previous contract language states that the amount of temps that can be used is based on quarterly absenteeism. At [Kansas City] that was between 4 and 5 percent. They bragged in the highlights about getting a cap for temps of 10 percent, so do the math!”

An autoworker at Dearborn Truck, which was the epicenter of ballot fraud allegations in 2015, described the gauntlet of UAW bureaucrats the workers had to file past in order to vote as the “Green Mile” a condemned man walks to the execution chamber. “We walk in and there are two desks with ballots, with alphabetical order lines, you show your card to get into the turnstiles. The Local 600 president is there to ‘answer questions.’ One temp asked him when she would get hired in, and he took her off to the side to answer. People were saying in the line, that if the UAW wanted the contract passed, they would find a way.”

Workers deposited their ballots into barrels, he said.

“Someone used a manila folder to push the votes down into the barrel. The ballot was a piece of paper with a UAW symbol, a “yes” box and a “no” box. You don’t punch in your vote you just mark it with a pen.”

The intimidation tactics during the voting process are in line with the outright threats made by union officials at local informational meetings. At Local 600, the union ejected a veteran worker for asking a critical question about the contract. During the General Motors balloting, union officials in Spring Hill, Tennessee called the cops on autoworkers campaigning outside the union hall against the contract.

More has come out in recent days about the concessions contained in the contract. A report by the *Detroit Free Press* yesterday revealed that neither the GM nor the Ford contract provide for retiree bonuses. Under the 2015 contract, retirees received \$250 annual bonuses each year and surviving spouses received \$125.

Retiree benefits have been under the cross hairs of the auto giants for years. According to the *Free Press*, the Detroit Three automakers have more than twice as many retirees as active employees. A major coup for the companies was the establishment of the UAW Retiree Medical Benefits Trust (URMBT) fund (known as the VEBA) in 2007, which effectively pushed tens of thousands of retirees off of the companies’ payrolls.

Through its control of the VEBA, a multi-billion-dollar investment vehicle with stock in the auto companies, the UAW now has a direct financial incentive to limit payouts to retirees.

Any worker hired after 2007 will not receive a company paid pension or retiree health care benefits.

In remarks to Wall Street analysts last month, GM’s Chief Financial Officer Dhivya Suryadevara boasted that the new UAW deal “protected the balance sheet with no increases to defined benefit pension obligations and no payments or increased obligations to retirees.”



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