

“We’re all in the same boat all over the world, fighting these greedy billionaires”

Michigan Ford engine plant workers denounce UAW sellout, plant closure

A WSWS reporting team

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Voting concludes Friday on the sellout agreement with Ford negotiated by the United Auto Workers. The contract maintains the hated two-tier wage system, introduces new technologies to monitor workers and opens the door to the wider use of super-exploited temporary part-time workers under the bogus claim of a “pathway” to full time states.

Claims of “job security” are belied by the sanctioning of the shutdown of the Romeo Engine Plant, which is slated to close with the loss of some 600 jobs. The facility, which currently builds engines for the Mustang Cobra and “F” series pickup trucks at one point employed upwards of 1,800 workers. Workers told WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters that the facility had been pitted in competition with the Lima, Ohio engine plant.

While the contract appears headed for ratification, there has been strong opposition at a number of key plants, including the engine plants in Lima, Ohio and Romeo, Michigan about 30 miles north of Detroit. On Wednesday workers at the Lima Engine Plant reportedly turned down the contract by a vote of 534-492. A majority of skilled trades workers at Cleveland Engine also voted “no,” while workers at the Romeo Engine Plant were still voting Thursday. Final totals from all Ford plants are due by Friday at 7:30 p.m.

In anticipation of the ratification of the Ford contract the UAW has already announced it is making “progress” in talks with Fiat Chrysler. The UAW said local leaders are set to meet in Detroit next week.

A veteran Romeo worker, A.J., said, “We go with the

jobs—160 are going with the Maverick program to Sterling transmission. Others will either have to retire or move to other plants like Flat Rock,” south of Detroit. “It is bad for the lower seniority guys who will have to go 60-70 miles away.”

Asked what was driving the job cuts he said, “The billionaires will never be able to spend that money. But they are taking more from us. People think that because you may not have an advanced education you don’t deserve a living wage.”

An indication of the anger toward the UAW felt at the Romeo plant—one worker raised his fist at a WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reporter shouting, “If you are from the UAW, I don’t want to talk to you.” The worker was happy to find out that the WSWS was fighting to build rank-and-file committees in opposition to the corrupt UAW and took a copy of the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

Another worker said that at the informational meeting held in the plant the UAW provided only doubletalk about the contract. “They didn’t have any answers. They said, ‘We’ll figure it out later.’” People were angry, she said. “Some have worked at six plants.”

A skilled trades worker with 28 years said there was strong opposition in the plant to the UAW-negotiated contract. “It is not true that everyone being laid off will get other jobs. There are too many workers being laid off for the Van Dyke transmission plant to absorb.”

He said Romeo Engine was the fifth plant he had worked at in his career at Ford. “At one job I had to drive 150 miles a day. I think a lot of workers will have to move out of state or face long commutes.” He noted

that several Ford plants had closed in the area, including in Utica and Chesterfield Township.

He spoke about the substandard pay scale imposed by the UAW at the nearby Ford Sterling Axle plant where workers top out at just \$22.50 per hour. Legacy Romeo workers are not being allowed to transfer to that facility.

He noted that it was the only axle plant operated by any of the Detroit automakers. “They don’t want to build parts; they want to go with outside vendors.”

A skilled trades worker said the contract was “BS.” He said, “I feel sorry for the guys that have to work on this worn-down equipment. They are already moving our gantries (structures that suspend engines and other components to work on them) over to the Van Dyke Transmission plant. Ford is always trying to do things as cheaply as possible.

“There are only 18 millwrights to run a whole plant. They have them do everything; construction, painting, welding. As for the temps, that’s just another way of dividing us. I tell the older workers: ‘You have to treat the young workers as equals because one day the company is going to offer them a \$1,000 bonus to screw the retirees.’

“My wife is a second-tier worker at Sterling Axle, which has a ‘competitive wage structure’ and even more tiers. The workers there get treated like crap. They beat those kids up.

“We’re working six out of seven days here because the number of workers at this plant is so low. They are working us to death.”

Another worker said he opposed the treatment of temporary workers. With all the loopholes in the UAW agreed contract, he said, “Temporary workers could be around for 20 years before they get an opportunity for full time.” He said he had no confidence in the UAW claims that it is reforming. “You will have corrupt people picking their corrupt successors.”

“This plant closing is screwing a lot of people,” said one veteran worker close to retirement. “Throughout the contract talks the UAW did not say anything about closing the plant. This was a total surprise to us. Six hundred workers are going to have to transfer to other plants.

“We ran this plant as efficiently as we could with the old and broken machinery. Every engine plant is pit against each other and it’s the union that does it.

They’ve already consolidated the skilled trades, outsourced material handling and other jobs to third-party contractors.

“The corruption of the UAW has gone on a long time. At this stage it isn’t going to be changed. I’m retiring soon but it is going to be harder and harder for the younger generation. All the company is concerned with is reducing costs.”

A third-party contract worker, employed by the janitorial firm ABM, also spoke to the WSWS. He said contract workers pay dues to the UAW but get no representation. “We pay \$500-\$600 in dues every year and when we asked them what was going to happen to the contract workers, they told us, ‘You’re going to have to look for another job.’ Some of us might have to transfer to the Flat Rock plant, more than an hour away, and the rest will be out of luck.

“Why would the UAW agree to the shutdown of this plant? The problem isn’t workers in other countries, like Mexico. We’re all in the same boat all over the world, fighting these greedy billionaires. These F-150 pickup trucks are selling for \$50,000. How can you afford to buy one on a second-tier wage?”

Another worker said, “This contract is nothing but a hand-me-down from GM. If you’re a temp and you don’t work three years without a layoff, they’ll start the clock all over for you to become full time. What is enough profit for these corporations?

“I’m a fourth generation UAW member. This is not your grandad’s union or even your dad’s union. They moved money from the strike fund into their own pockets. I’ve had hard times in the past when I couldn’t pay my house or car note, but I always paid my union dues. How do they pay me back? By sending one crony from the UAW International to tell us our fate.”



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