

United Auto Workers declares sellout Ford contract ratified amidst widespread opposition

Tom Hall
16 November 2019

The United Auto Workers (UAW) announced the ratification of the national agreement at Ford in a statement posted to its website late Friday night. According to the official tally, the contract passed by a 56-44 percent margin.

Nothing can be taken at face value that comes from the UAW, which has shown time and again that it will run roughshod over the democratic will of autoworkers. However, even assuming that the vote totals are legitimate, they do not express support for the agreement.

The voting itself took place in an atmosphere of intimidation and lies emanating from the UAW. Autoworkers who asked critical questions at local informational meetings were promptly thrown out. Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* explained that local officials threatened workers that, if they did not vote to pass the contract, the UAW would repeat its performance at General Motors. The UAW sent GM workers on strike for a month only to make them vote on a contract that accepted all of the company's key demands.

Nevertheless, autoworkers cast "no" votes in significant numbers, in defiance of the union's threats. Louisville Assembly and the Kentucky Truck Plant voted down the contract in massive numbers, by 70 percent and 63 percent, respectively. Earlier in the month, Chicago Assembly workers voted down the contract by a 2-to-1 margin. Ninety percent of workers at Romeo Engine, which is closing under the terms of the contract, also voted "no."

"Ford is sitting on 37 billion in cash, [but] they continue to cut the throat of their employees," a worker from Lima Engine said. "This [contract] is only good

for... let's see, no one but Ford and the International [UAW]. Next contract they will go after health care."

"I'm sure we'll learn about all negative things about the contract that were [kept hidden from us]," a Dearborn Truck worker said. There can be no doubt, he added, that "the cap on temporary workers will be raised. The surveillance program must be opposed."

A significant feature of the vote has been widespread abstention rates at key facilities. At Dearborn Truck, where the UAW is widely believed to have stuffed the ballot in 2015 to ensure the passage of the last Ford contract, the abstention rate was nearly 50 percent. At Chicago Assembly, the abstention rate was even higher.

While there are still ballots left to be counted as of this writing, it appears that significantly more workers voted against or abstained than voted in favor of the contract. Thus, the vote at Ford is a vote of no confidence in the UAW. The contract passed despite massive opposition because workers knew that the UAW would not come back with anything better.

"Every Ford employee and temporary employee will be at the top-rate for full-time status at the end of this four-year agreement," said acting UAW President Rory Gamble, who took over from Gary Jones after the latter was implicated in the widening federal corruption probe.

"This is a life-changing contract for many and provides a template for all future Ford UAW members to a full-time, top-rate status," he continued. "There will be no more permanent temporary situations and no more permanent tiers. Ford's commitment to job security and assembly in the United States is a model for American manufacturers."

In fact, the contract makes the UAW jointly

responsible, to an even greater degree than before, for attacks on the workers. The most sinister expression of this is the union's agreement to vast camera networks throughout the plants, which will enable Ford to spy on workers every second they are on the line.

The contract paves the way for the conversion of a significant section of the workforce into highly exploited temps, strung out on a bogus "pathway" to regular employment. There is nothing in the contract to prevent Ford from laying off temps before they reach the threshold in order to avoid hiring them as regular employees.

The caps on the number of temps at the nationwide and local level can be overridden, according to the contract, if both the union and Ford agree to it. The moratorium on plant closures, which exempts Romeo Engine, is similarly worthless. The UAW allowed GM to violate a similar provision last year when it closed three plants in the US. The UAW ratified the closures in the new contract and allowed the company to close a fourth.

As for Ford's supposed "commitment" to American "job security," the company is in the midst of a global jobs massacre demanded by its Wall Street investors. It has already eliminated 1,000 factory jobs and fired 7,000 white collar workers in the United States.

"American job security" is the UAW's code word for plant closures outside of the United States, which it fraudulently claims will benefit American workers. In Europe, Ford has laid off 12,000 hourly workers and closed five plants. But there can be no doubt that the UAW will agree to whatever plant closures Ford demands in the US, especially as a growing downturn and technological shifts in the industry render much of its manufacturing capacity "surplus."

Next up on the docket for the UAW is the contract at Fiat Chrysler. Final talks are set to begin on Monday, with a tentative agreement likely shortly afterward.

Industry commentators are expressing a certain degree of anxiety in the press over the response of Fiat Chrysler workers, who have the highest proportion of temporary workers out of the Detroit automakers, to a tentative deal. In 2015, FCA workers voted down the initial agreement by a 2-to-1 margin, the first defeat of a national contract at the UAW in three decades. This was the beginning of a rank and file rebellion which the UAW was only barely able to get back under control.

It is now evident that the UAW is punishing workers at FCA, which was the lead bargainer in the last contract, by making them vote last in this round. No doubt, they are trying to put the screws on Fiat Chrysler workers by presenting them with a *fait accompli*, with the GM and Ford deals already in hand.

Autoworkers need new organizations to carry their struggle forward. The corruption and sellouts of the UAW are the product of the fact that it is an instrument of corporate management, not a workers' organization.

Autoworkers should form rank-and-file committees that will fight for what workers need, not what the companies declare is acceptable. In opposition to "management rights," these committees will serve as organs of workers' power, laying the foundation for genuine industrial democracy.

In opposition to the "America First" poison of the unions, they will fight for the unification of the working class of all countries, who are engaged in a single struggle against the same giant multinational corporations.

In particular, these committees must demand the immediate reinstatement of the Silao Nine, Mexican GM workers who were fired for supporting the strike in the United States.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact