

Workers at the General Motors Corvette Assembly Plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky overwhelmingly reject UAW-backed local agreement

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Workers at General Motors' Bowling Green Assembly Plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky have resoundingly rejected a pro-company local agreement brought forward by United Auto Workers Local 2164. The Bowling Green factory, with over 800 hourly employees, is the sole producer of the Chevrolet Corvette sports vehicle. The plant also produces engines for the Corvette Z06 and Cadillac CTS-V.

Final voting revealed massive opposition, with 98 percent of production workers, and 97 percent of skilled trades, voting against. Workers have also voted in favor of carrying out a strike. Meanwhile, the UAW is doing everything it can to prevent a strike, with local officials saying that the strike authorization must go through "a process."

The "process" refers to waiting for strike approval from the corrupt bureaucrats at the UAW regional offices and international headquarters, who have spent the last 40 years suppressing opposition in the working class and, therefore, have no intention of allowing a strike to take place.

With demand high for the eighth generation (C8) Corvettes, both management and the UAW want to avoid a strike at all costs. According to data published by iSeeCars.com, the Corvette was among the highest-selling vehicles for 10 months in 2021. At the same time, production on the C8 has been repeatedly delayed, beginning in 2019 when 48,000 GM workers carried out a 40-day strike, followed by the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the ongoing supply chain issues that have resulted.

The contract rejection in Bowling Green is the latest in a growing rebellion of autoworkers to pro-company

contracts brought forward by the UAW, a trend which began with the roughly 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia in 2021, who rejected three UAW-backed agreements. Other notable examples include 10,000 John Deere workers and workers at autoparts manufacturer Dana Incorporated.

It is significant that the Bowling Green plant was among those who voted against the UAW national agreement in 2019. No doubt the experiences of that struggle are contributing to the present fighting mood among workers.

Opposition to the local agreement is primarily centered around working conditions, particularly health and safety, as well as issues of pay and benefits. In addition, workers are concerned about GM's increasing reliance on outside contractors for such things as 3D printing, maintenance and striping.

Speaking on the rejection, Local 2164 shop chairman Jason Watson told the *Bowling Green Daily News*, "We pretty much knew what the outcome would be." This begs the question, if the UAW knew it was a rotten deal, then why did they sign off on it?

Regarding health and safety, it is an undeniable fact that the auto plants, schools and other workplaces are major sources of transmission for COVID-19. While the impact of the disease on the Bowling Green plant has been kept under wraps by the UAW, Kentucky is among the hardest hit states in the country, with over 1 million total cases, and 12,687 total deaths as of January 21.

At automotive giant Ford's Louisville Assembly Plant, located roughly two hours from Bowling Green, there are currently 200 workers out sick with the virus. The current surge is the result of the intersection of the highly transmissible Omicron variant with the homicidal

government policy of letting the virus rip through society.

The common refrain from the auto companies and the trade unions is that there simply is not enough money to meet workers' demands. This is a bald-faced lie. Throughout the pandemic, the major automotive manufacturers have continued to rake in record profits by taking advantage of shortages and raising prices. Meanwhile, workers have seen a steady decline in real wages as a result of rampant inflation, which currently is around 7 percent, forcing them to pay more and more for basic necessities like food and gas.

To carry their struggle forward, workers at the Bowling Green plant must take matters into their own hands by immediately forming rank-and-file safety committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves. These committees must be independent of, and in opposition to, the trade unions and the Democratic and Republican parties, all of whom are hostile to the interests of the working class. Above all, these organizations must be imbued with a socialist and internationalist program and perspective.

Workers must insist on the right to a healthy and safe workplace, decent pay and reasonable hours. The rejection of the local agreement should be used as a springboard for workers to press their demands. In this fight Bowling Green Assembly workers have many potential allies. They must forge links with workers at the other auto companies and appeal to their class brothers and sisters throughout Kentucky, which is a major regional industrial center, with two major Ford plants and the UPS Worldport air freight hub in Louisville.

By forming a rank-and-file committee, workers will join a growing network of educators, automotive parts workers, health care workers, Amazon workers and others who comprise the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The WSWs stands ready to assist workers in building their committees. Contact us today!



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