Anger at Detroit Diesel as UAW attempts to rush a vote on six-year sellout agreement

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Work at Detroit Diesel? We want to hear from you: Tell us about the conditions at your plant and what workers want to see in the next contract. Your identity will be kept confidential.

Read the statement: "Vote NO on UAW sellout contract! Form a rank-and-file committee to take control of the struggle!"

Autoworkers are furious over the details of a new six-year contract, which the United Auto Workers (UAW) is attempting to ram down their throats at Detroit Diesel. Contract "highlights" released at May 6 informational meetings, the tentative agreement between the UAW and Detroit Diesel Corporation (DDC) make clear it is a pro-company charter. The deal covers 1,300 workers at Detroit Diesel's plant in Redford, Michigan.

The UAW is attempting to ram through the deal in a snap vote Tuesday. It provides pathetic wage increases far below inflation and imposes higher out-of-pocket medical costs. Cumulative raises over the life of the five-year, 10-month-long contract amount to a pathetic 8 percent, equivalent to less than one year of inflation at current rates. The contract contains general wage increases of just 3.5 percent in 2022, 3 percent in 2026 and 2.5 percent in 2027 under conditions where inflation is currently running at 8.5 percent annually.

While Local 163 officials claimed to have reduced the wage progression from an absurd nine years to six for second tier workers, this will only apply to future hires, with current tiers forced to complete their full progression. From the handout released by the UAW it appears that the "grow in" time has been shortened through a cynical sleight of hand by simply reducing the top wage, not by raising starting pay or annual progression amounts. The net result is that the gap between 2nd tier workers and seniority workers widens.

To sell this bitter pill, the UAW agreed to a $6,000 signing bonus, a large portion of which will be eaten up by taxes and deductions for union dues.

In an added insult, the contract is not even a finished document, with the Local 163 leadership provocatively admitting that language dealing with payroll discrepancies and other outstanding issues of concern to workers had not been finalized.

Local 163 ignored a 98 percent strike authorization vote, announcing a settlement at contract expiration on April 29, even though final contract language was not in place. Workers had to wait until Friday to get the UAW's self-serving "highlights," hardly giving them any time to review the contact ahead of the scheduled vote.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers to reject this contract by the widest possible margin. But in informational meetings Friday, Local 163 officials declared openly that they intend to continue to defy the strike mandate and keep workers on the job if they vote the contract down, and that the main economics of the deal would not change after a "no" vote.

A "no" vote should be followed by immediate preparations by rank-and-file workers to take the initiative out of the hands of corrupt UAW bureaucracy and prepare for a strike by forming an independent rank-and-file strike committee. Workers at Detroit Diesel, a subsidiary of Daimler Truck who produce engines for trucks and military vehicles, are in a powerful position to win their demands but face in the pro-corporate UAW an adversary just as hostile as management itself.

A strike, however, would meet with significant support from workers everywhere, who are all facing the same attacks on their incomes and benefits, jointly imposed in many cases by the corrupt trade unions. In particular, 1,000 agricultural equipment workers at CNH, on strike throughout the western Midwest, have formed a rank-and-file committee of their own to counter the UAW's sabotage of their struggle and would welcome a united struggle with their brothers and sisters at Detroit Diesel.

Local 163 officials offered only evasions in response to questions from an angry audience in informational meetings Friday at the UAW Region 1A hall, which were also livestreamed on Facebook. Aware of the anger building up, shop chair Mark "Gibby" Gibson equivocated at the

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informational meetings, claiming on the one hand that the contract was great but also declaring that he would "understand" if workers voted it down. Gibson tried to cover for the local's actions by asserting that the UAW was required by law to hold a vote on the company's final offer. In fact, the union was perfectly entitled to call a strike at the contract expiration if a new agreement had not been settled.

Workers at the meetings expressed anger that whatever pathetic wage increases they received would be eaten up by higher medical costs. One worker wondered why the union had agreed to a six-year contract when inflation was running rampant. Others were angry at the delay in getting contract details and the speed with which the UAW was pushing for a vote.

Whatever is agreed to will only be the starting point for further concessions. The contract is full of corporatist language, pledging the union to help management cut costs by changing or eliminating work rules and conditions. For example, according to the highlights, "The parties agree that the primary mechanism to ensure job security is a sustained competitive position in a changing marketplace,"—in plain language, through massive cost-cutting and by exploiting the workforce as much as possible. "To that end the parties agree to the need for maintaining focus on work rules, practices, processes and conditions that have an adverse effect on operations and to make recommendations for efficiency improvements."

Facebook posts give a sense of the anger felt by workers.

"A ton of info, one meeting, no info packet, only 3 days to go over the info, And only 1 day to discuss with coworkers before we have to vote Tuesday. Why the hurry? " said one worker.

Another expressed his anger over the fact that so many outstanding issues had not been settled. "For two years we worked through corona, put our families at risk and now you are going to come around and talk about a screw up? I have a problem with that."

Another wrote, "When burger flippers and Walmart are on your heels in pay scale you deserve better. Wake up!"

Many pointed out that inflation would quickly outstrip wages. "For me now it's not just that I am suffering, it's my wife and daughter too. This contract offer is awful considering the cost of living in today's day and age."

"The only thing increasing is my bills, while my paycheck stays the same."

A number of workers reaching out to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* said the proposed contract terms were outrageous given the sacrifices workers made during the pandemic and the spiraling cost of living.

One worker said, "I've been there eight years at the plant. Started when I was 18. The plant runs seven days. Right now, everyone is saying vote 'no' on contract, that it's not enough money and that the top pay is not even close. We're trying to get more bonus and more vacation time. If we get the money we deserve, you could make that $6,000 [bonus] in two weeks.

"People trying to retire are also saying no to the contract, I haven't met one person who said 'yes.'"

Workers at the adjoining axle plant, which is part of the same manufacturing complex as Detroit Diesel, also expressed their support. About 1,000 workers at the axle plant are members of Local 163 but work under a separate contract.

By issuing a resounding "no" vote against this contract, workers will be making a powerful statement that they do not accept the destruction of their living standards for the sake of corporate profits. There is no reason that Detroit Diesel, part of the global Daimler Truck AG which recorded more than $2.5 billion in profits in 2021, cannot meet workers' demands for significant improvements to pay and benefits.

However, to win their demands workers must take the conduct of their struggle out of the hands of the pro-company UAW by building a rank-and-file committee. This committee, democratically controlled by workers themselves, would advance and fight for demands that meet workers' actual needs. This should include cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) and a 40 percent pay increase to catch up with inflation and decades of concessions and wage stagnation. Benefits must be fully protected, and workers must have control over health and safety, including the right to refuse to work in case of a coronavirus outbreak.

The fight for these demands requires that Detroit Diesel workers turn out to their allies at Daimler Trucks, Freightliner and auto workers across the Detroit area, nationally and internationally. This includes 1,000 CNH industrial farm and heavy equipment workers in Iowa who walked out last week. A special appeal should be made to axle workers to join and support their fight.

Workers interested in forming a rank-and-file committee should contact the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* by filling out the form below:

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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