

Detroit Diesel workers: Vote NO on UAW sellout contract! Form a rank-and-file committee to take control of the struggle!

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
9 May 2022

Take up the fight! Contact the WSWS today to get started building a rank-and-file committee to fight the UAW sellout. Submissions will be kept anonymous.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges Detroit Diesel workers to vote down the tentative agreement today by the widest possible margin. Workers showed their determination to fight last month by voting 98 percent to authorize a strike. In response, the United Auto Workers has brought back a slave charter which will cut benefits and slash real wages for years to come.

Now, the UAW is openly stating that it will refuse to call a strike even if the contract is rejected and that the economics of the deal will not fundamentally change. Through their own actions and words, the union bureaucrats show they are tools of management, not workers' representatives. Workers must respond by taking matters into their own hands, forming a rank-and-file committee to mobilize against this sabotage, prepare for strike action and appeal for the broadest possible support and collaboration with autoworkers across Michigan and the world.

UAW Local 163 President Mark "Gibby" Gibson claimed in Friday informational meetings that the tentative agreement is great. But the union's own "highlights" package shows this deal is rotten to the core. Possibly the worst is that cumulative wage increases are only 8 percent over the six-year life of the contract. In other words, wage increases over six years will be less than a single year's worth of inflation, which is currently 8.5 percent. If *that* is what the union chose to highlight, what other concessions are lurking in the full contract?

The union bureaucrats boast that they reduced the insane nine-year wage progression, which should never have existed in the first place, to six years, which is almost as bad. However, the new progression applies only to new hires and tops out at a lower rate, effectively creating a new tier of lower paid workers.

Under normal conditions, a six-year contract would be

obscenely long. But under the present conditions, with massive economic instability, COVID-19 and the danger of an all-out war, six years is an eternity. Nobody knows what the world will look like in six years, but the UAW would have Detroit Diesel workers locked into the same substandard contract for that long.

The contract also commits the UAW "to focus on work rules, practices, processes and conditions that have an adverse impact on operations and make recommendations for efficiency improvements." In other words, the union pledges to squeeze every ounce of production and profit possible off the backs of workers.

The deal contains a \$6,000 signing bonus, but as every old-timer knows, the worse the contract the bigger the signing bonus, which is used to prey on the economic insecurity of the workforce, and younger workers, in particular. In any event, a large portion of that money will be eaten up by taxes and union dues.

As a final insult, the UAW admitted Friday that the full language of the agreement has not been finalized. In other words, the union is making workers vote on a contract that does not even exist. After the vote, the terms can be changed or inserted without the consent of the workers.

The way forward

Across the United States, the corporate elites are declaring war on the working class. Last week, the Federal Reserve announced an interest rate hike whose stated purpose is to rein in modest wage increases. What the corporations and the government are trying to prepare is a showdown with workers modeled on the 1970s and 1980s. But under these conditions, the UAW—much of whose top leadership is behind bars for accepting corporate bribes—is attempting to

pin workers down and prevent them from fighting back.

But what the UAW wants is one thing. What will actually happen depends also on what workers do. The union bureaucrats may treat workers with contempt, but the workers are more powerful than the bureaucracy. And the time when the unions could simply ram through sellouts without serious opposition is over.

There is more than enough money to guarantee every Detroit Diesel worker a high and secure standard of living. Daimler Truck AG, Detroit Diesel's parent company, boasted over \$2.5 billion profits last year. Moreover, Diesel workers are in a powerful position because they build engines vital to Daimler's operations.

But most important, this contract is being voted on as the biggest movement of the working class in decades gets underway. All over the world, millions are fighting back against the same thing: the runaway cost of living, brutal working conditions and the disastrous impact of COVID-19 policies imposed on society by the corporate elite.

In the Asian island country of Sri Lanka, massive protests and a general strike forced the resignation of the prime minister this week. In the United States, hundreds of thousands of workers have their contracts expiring over the next two months, including 20,000 dock workers on the West Coast. Thousands of California nurses at Cedars-Sinai Hospital, as well as more than 1,000 agricultural equipment workers at CNH in the Midwest, are already on strike.

Detroit Diesel workers can and must take their place alongside their brothers and sisters in this growing movement. To do this, they need the means through which they can fight not only the attacks of management but the sabotage of the UAW. In the first place, workers must be on guard today against any potential vote-rigging by the union. Workers should act immediately to ensure that they can exercise independent oversight of the balloting.

The next step after the vote is the creation of a rank-and-file committee, independent of the union and composed of the most trusted workers from the shop floor. This committee will insist that workers' democratic decision to strike will be carried out. It will also demand that workers be adequately provisioned from the UAW's \$800 million strike fund, funding through workers' dues. Instead of siphoning off this money to pay for officials' bloated salaries, workers must demand it must be used to dispense strike pay at \$750 per week, beginning on the *first day* of the strike.

The committee should also fan out to appeal for the broadest possible support from autoworkers at the Big Three and parts plants throughout Detroit, workers at Daimler Trucks and the auto industry in general. In particular, they should appeal for support from striking CNH workers and for support and advice from John Deere and Volvo Trucks

workers, who rebelled last year against the UAW's sabotage of their own strikes.

Gibbs says that any future tentative agreement would contain no significant improvements on the current one. Workers must respond: That is not your decision to make! To ensure rank-and-file control, workers should demand an end to "bargaining" sessions behind closed doors. These are really "conspiring" sessions between management and the UAW to strategize how to force through a sellout.

All future sessions must be livestreamed over the internet for workers to view, and representatives from the rank-and-file must be present. If the UAW rejects these conditions, then the bargaining committee must be thrown out and replaced with representatives from the rank and file.

A rank-and-file committee will also provide the means through which workers can formulate their demands, without which they will not accept any contract. We propose that these include:

- Cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) fully indexed to inflation;
- A 40 percent wage increase to catch up with inflation and make up for decades of concessions and wage stagnation;
- Fully paid medical, with no deductibles and co-pays;
- A three-year maximum contract expiration;
- Workers' control over health and safety, including the right to refuse to work in case of a coronavirus outbreak; and
- Restoration of full pensions and retiree health care for all classes of workers.

Detroit Diesel workers are in a powerful position, but they must go organize themselves now for a fight. For assistance in organizing a rank-and-file committee, reach out to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact