

UAW seeks to block distribution of *Autoworker Newsletter*, censors Detroit Diesel workers on Facebook

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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.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) is terrified of its membership.

On Tuesday, 1,300 workers at Detroit Diesel voted overwhelmingly (by nearly 80 percent) to reject the sell-out contract brought back by the UAW. It was the latest in a series of union-backed contracts defeated by workers and gave expression to a growing mood of anger and opposition under conditions of soaring inflation.

The UAW wants to prevent workers from sharing information and organizing opposition to the next stage in the union's efforts to force through the pro-company agreement (which, at the current rate of inflation, would impose a 40 percent cut in real wages over the life of the six-year agreement).

To this end, it has sought desperately to censor the expression of worker opposition online and block the distribution of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*.

In the run-up to the vote, UAW Local 163 scheduled three informational sessions after releasing a bogus "highlights" reel to workers. The first two events were live-streamed on the local's Facebook page, where workers immediately flooded the comments denouncing the contract, the company and the union, and encouraged their coworkers to vote "no."

By the time the third informational session was supposed to be live-streamed, the UAW told workers to watch the first two sessions online. "Issues with Wi-Fi," workers were told, was to blame, not the reticence of the UAW to provide another platform for workers to

voice their opinions.

Operating under the dubious principle that if opposition is not expressed, it does not exist, Ryan Martin, chairman of UAW Local 163's election committee, then disabled all comments to the first two live-streamed events.

As it turned out, the UAW's efforts at censorship had, if anything, the opposite result. Workers responded with a resounding "no" vote. In an effort to be more proactive, the UAW has decided that all posts to the group will be censored in advance, with commenting disabled.

At the same time, the UAW has sought to block the distribution of the *Autoworker Newsletter*. The WSWS sent a reporting team to the Detroit Diesel plant the day of the vote to speak to workers about the contract and to distribute copies of the *Newsletter* on a public sidewalk outside the plant. A hysterical UAW representative attempted to intimidate and threaten the reporters, declaring, falsely, that they had no right to be there.

The same Ryan Martin later issued a statement on Facebook (comments disabled, of course), that appears as follows:

Martin was careful enough not to mention the source of the "unapproved flyers," for fear that referring to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* might only encourage workers to sign-up for it.

The language, in any case, is significant. "We had people on *our* property," he writes, "who were trespassing and distributing unapproved flyers."

"Our property?" workers might ask. Well indeed it should be "ours," but right now the plant is owned by the company. Does the UAW expect workers to believe

that the company is on the same side as the workers who it is fighting against? What Martin really means by “our” is the UAW, management, and the company on one side, and workers on the other.

“We notified Security,” Martin writes, that is, the “security” hired and operated by Detroit Diesel. The UAW appeals to the company, with which it is conspiring, in a (failed) attempt to prevent workers from reading the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

And upon what right does the UAW make this attempt? This material was not “approved,” Martin writes. “Approved by whom?” workers might ask. “Well, by the UAW,” of course, Martin would reply, “along with the owners of ‘our property,’ Detroit Diesel.”

“Why should the UAW and Detroit Diesel have the right to decide what we can read?” workers might ask. To which Martin would respond... Well, Martin can reply for himself.

The incident is significant in that it expresses both the actual attitude of the UAW to its own membership and its extreme nervousness over the opposition that exists. It flails about in a desperate attempt to gain control of a situation over which it has no real control.

The UAW’s efforts will, however, only increase the determination of workers to organize themselves independently, through the formation of a rank-and-file committee, which is the essential step in the preparation of the next stage in the struggle.



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