Detroit Diesel: Reject the second UAW sellout contract! Demand strike action!

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Detroit Diesel workers who are voting today on a six-year contract proposal submitted by the United Auto Workers to vote "No" on this rotten deal.

A contract rejection, however, is only the first step. Diesel workers must take the conduct of their struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy and into their own. The very fact that the UAW has brought this deal back proves that it cannot be trusted to lead a fight. Instead, workers should form a rank-and-file committee to demand an immediate setting of a strike date, an end to closed door "negotiations" and rank-and-file control over the entire process.

The deal is virtually identical to the one which workers had voted to reject by 79 percent only two weeks ago. Cumulative wage increases, over the course of six years, have been bumped up from 8 to 10 percent, still amounting to a massive pay cut after inflation. The main difference in the new deal, as far as can be gleaned from the UAW's self-serving highlights, is an increase in bonus money. The signing bonus has been increased from $6,000 to $7,000, and workers will receive three lump sum payments over the course of the deal equal to four percent of their wages. The six-year wage progress, the maintenance of two-tier wages and cuts to healthcare benefits appear to have been left in place.

The obvious purpose of throwing extra money towards bonuses, particularly the up-front signing bonus, is to prey upon the economic insecurity of the workforce, and younger workers in particular. But this does not alter the fact that the deal uses inflation to push down workers' standard of living, freeing money for big profits for the company's shareholders. Every experienced worker knows: the worse the contract, the bigger the signing bonus.

That the UAW has brought back this contract is not only an insult to workers' intelligence, it is a direct attack. Through the rejection of the last deal and through a 98 percent vote to authorize a strike, Detroit Diesel workers have proven that they are determined to fight not only for themselves but for future generations of autoworkers. But the UAW is siding with management in order to block such a struggle. The incestuous relations between the UAW and corporate management are underlined by the fact that International President Ray Curry earns $150,000 a year as a labor representative on the board of directors of Mercedes Benz, the parent company of Detroit Diesel.

The UAW has done everything that it said in advance it would do. In informational meetings prior to the vote on the first tentative agreement, Local 163 officials declared openly that even if workers voted down the deal the union would not call a strike, and that any second deal they brought back would contain virtually identical economics to the first. For once, the UAW has told workers the truth!

Instead of setting a strike after workers voted down the contract, the UAW enforced an information blackout. Worse, it began censoring workers and limiting their access to information by turning off commenting on the local's Facebook page. The union also did not livestream the second round of informational meetings, having learned its lesson from the first time when the comments section in the livestream was used by workers to campaign against the deal. The local justified this decision by claiming that the UAW Monitor would not allow it.

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Finally, the UAW has badgered and harassed workers who speak out, and sent goons out to threaten campaigners for the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

A "No" vote is absolutely necessary. But for Detroit Diesel workers, it is not just a question of holding out for a few extra percentage points in the next deal, but fighting to keep themselves out of economic destitution. To the extent that it hasn't already, Detroit Diesel wants to convert the factory into a sweatshop and workers into industrial slaves. They feel emboldened because they have the UAW on their side. As long as the UAW holds the reins, they will steer everything towards a betrayal.

Therefore, workers must take the reins into their own hands. Indeed, even before the votes are counted, workers must be on guard against any signs of ballot stuffing by the union.

The next step is the formation of a rank-and-file committee consisting of workers themselves, whose basic principle is that workers should control the process, not the bureaucracy. A committee would organize workers inside the plant independently to fight for the following demands:

• The setting of an immediate strike date;

• An end to secret talks which have produced nothing but sellouts, and the livestreaming of all future talks over the internet;

• The resignation of the bargaining committee, and their replacement with one consisting entirely of rank-and-file workers without ties to the UAW officialdom; and

• An end to the attacks on workers' free speech and UAW intimidation.

A committee will provide the means for workers to democratically discuss what their own demands are and their strategy for fighting for them, free from threats of intimidation by either the union or management. We propose that workers take up the following demands:

• Cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) fully indexed to inflation;

• A 40 percent wage increase to 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.

The committee should turn outward for the broadest possible support from workers around the country, including 1,200 CNH farm and heavy equipment workers who are striking in Wisconsin and Iowa, striking oil refinery workers in Richmond, California and nearly 3,500 aluminum workers at Arconic in Iowa, Indiana, New York and Tennessee who voted unanimously for strike action earlier this month.

A stand by workers at Detroit Diesel will inspire confidence among workers everywhere. What is happening at Diesel is not unique. All over the country, unions are enforcing sellouts containing wage increases a fraction of inflation. The UAW itself has also pushed through a series of contracts containing 2 to 4 percent wage increases, including at Volvo Trucks and Dana Corporation.

Other major national agreements have followed the same pattern including Nabisco (2-2.5 percent), Kellogg's (3 percent), oil refinery workers (2.5 – 3.0 percent). Overall wages for unionized workers rose just 3.5 percent in 2021, below the increases for nonunion workers and well below the official inflation rate, itself an underestimate, of 7.5 percent. Workers know that "their" unions are in bed with the companies and are also looking for a way to fight back.

All over the country, workers have formed rank-and-file committees to mobilize workers' power independent of both management and the bought-and-paid-for unions. These include committees of autoworkers, oil workers, teachers, nurses and others. Now, Detroit Diesel workers must take their place within this growing movement and help prepare a counteroffensive by the working class in defense of wages and working conditions.

Fill out the form below to tell us what you think of the contract. You can also contact the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* for assistance in building a rank-and-file committee.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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