

GM Subsystems workers: Reject UAW's pro-company deal

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After announcing a tentative agreement with GM Subsystems on June 30, the United Auto Workers is holding a ratification vote this Monday and Tuesday without giving workers enough time to study and discuss the contract. The UAW expects workers to vote on the deal immediately after attending "informational meetings" where union officials are expected to release the first, self-serving explanation of the agreement.

After forcing the 600 GM Subsystems workers to stay on the job for 14 months following the expiration of their contract, the UAW announced a settlement 15 minutes before a June 30 strike deadline. A walkout would have immediately led to the shutdown of four key General Motors plants in Michigan.

Workers need at least a week to study and discuss the contract, which is no doubt written in such a complicated manner that it would take a lawyer to interpret it. The only reason the UAW would be rushing through a vote under such conditions is because it is a sellout, which will maintain the status of the GM Subsystems workers as a super-exploited cheap labor workforce. Rank-and-file workers should reject any such deal with the contempt it deserves.

Management and the UAW claim GM Subsystems is an outside contract firm and thus not subject to the UAW master agreement covering 45,000 General Motors workers. GM Subsystem workers handle and sort parts used in the assembly of cars and trucks, working side by side with regular GM employees but only earning a fraction of their wages. The workers generally start at just \$15 an hour and top out at \$17 an hour, about half the pay for first-tier "legacy" assembly workers, who make around \$31 an hour.

GM Subsystems workers are in a powerful position, since a strike could impact production at Lansing Grand River, Flint Assembly, Lake Orion Assembly and Factory Zero in Detroit, which produces the Hummer electric

vehicle. Although GM's flagship electric vehicle plant in Detroit is in the midst of retooling, hundreds of additional GM Subsystems workers are expected to be brought in as production ramps up.

The UAW has proven again and again it is nothing more than a bribed tool of management. Under conditions of raging inflation, UAW officials have blocked strike after strike, including at Dana, Detroit Diesel, Ventra and now GM Subsystems. They have brought back concessionary agreements containing raises far below the current 8.6 percent annual inflation rate.

At the Ventra auto parts plant in Evart, Michigan workers recently voted down by 95 percent a sellout agreement that contained a miserable \$2.50 per hour raise over the life of a five-year contract. One UAW official even told workers they did not deserve the same pay as workers at the Big Three.

GM Subsystems workers do the same work as General Motors workers and deserve the same compensation. They should follow the example of the Ventra workers and form a rank-and-file factory committee to campaign for the rejection of this deal and for an immediate \$10 hourly raise and full cost-of-living protection. They further should demand full-paid medical benefits, without co-pays and premiums.

The rejection of the deal is critical but it is only the first step. GM Subsystems should demand the tossing out of the UAW negotiating team that signed this deal and elect a new committee from the shop floor. All negotiations must be live-streamed with full rank-and-file oversight.

If no agreement can be reached that includes the demands that workers and their families need, then a firm strike deadline must be set. There must be a campaign against the strikebreaking by the UAW international, which is demanding GM workers cross the picket lines of GM Subsystems workers.

The contract vote at GM Subsystems takes place as a

militant mood is building among GM workers and other sections of autoworkers after decades of concessions and givebacks. A GM worker in Lansing told the WSWS, “The workers at GM Subsystems almost went on strike. The word around the plant is that the workers want to strike. Workers are saying it’s time to take back what they have given up. The UAW is not doing enough.”

The terms of the current GM Subsystems contract will have a direct bearing on GM’s expansion into electric vehicles, since the company is planning to open four new battery plants that will not be under the UAW-GM national agreement. GM and other automakers have indicated plans to use low-paid contract workers for battery plants as well as EV assembly plants. A GM battery plant in Brownstown Township, Michigan currently employees GM Subsystems workers at a fraction of the wages of assembly plant workers.

The 2009 agreement by the UAW to permit GM to use Subsystems workers as industrial slaves is part of an endless list of betrayals by the union. This includes overseeing a vast expansion of part-time and temporary workers, the imposition of a multi-tier wage and benefit system and the elimination of hard-won gains such as pension, overtime after eight hours and cost of living protection.

In 2018, then UAW Vice President for GM Cindy Estrada provoked outrage among workers by agreeing to allow GM to replace some full-time workers with lower paid Subsystems workers at the Lordstown, Ohio and Lake Orion plants. The UAW insisted the action was necessary to “save” jobs. However, that did not deter the UAW from agreeing to the closure of the Lordstown plant as part of the 2019 contract agreement.

The GM Subsystems workers deserve the support of all autoworkers. In opposition to the attempts of the UAW to divide workers, a common fight is needed to eliminate tiers and contract work and provide all workers with decent pay and working conditions.



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