

UAW convention rejects amendment opposing tiered wage system, approves wage increase for top officials

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Delegates at the United Auto Workers 38th Constitutional Convention in Detroit decisively voted down a proposed amendment banning the negotiation of hated multi-tier wage structures.

At the same time, the convention approved another motion, by a wide margin, to increase the salaries and pensions of UAW international officers by 3 percent.

With the working class facing an unprecedented crisis, delegates were subjected to an almost nonstop barrage of self-congratulatory happy talk. The complacency evident among the majority of delegates and union officials stands in sharp contrast to the sentiment in the plants, where anger over decades of UAW-imposed concessions is boiling over in the form of massive contract rejection votes.

Even as UAW President Ray Curry and other executives exchanged high fives at the convention, yet another UAW official was sentenced to jail for embezzling millions of dollars in workers' dues. Timothy Edmunds, financial secretary of UAW Local 412, was sentenced to 57 months in prison Tuesday for embezzling \$2.1 million in union funds. He pleaded guilty to the charges in March. The federal monitor overseeing the UAW had accused the UAW leadership of covering up its investigation of corruption in violation of a court order.

The same day, General Motors CEO Marry Barra implied that the automaker was preparing job cuts in the wake of a sharp fall in profits in the second quarter. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, GM's second quarter net income fell 40 percent from the previous year. Barra stated that "the company is cutting discretionary spending and limiting hiring, and is prepared to tighten costs even further if economic

conditions worsen."

Neither Curry nor Vice President Cindy Estrada, who presided over much of the proceedings Tuesday, took any note of this.

In a letter to delegates sent Tuesday afternoon, UAW presidential candidate William Lehman, a 34-year-old rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks, noted that the layoffs at GM and previously announced cuts at Ford and Stellantis were only the beginning.

"Workers know what [Barra's statement] means: Massive job cuts and demands for further concessions," he wrote. "And everyone knows that the UAW apparatus will agree to everything that the companies demand."

The keynote speaker at the convention Tuesday morning, Democratic Michigan Congressman Debbie Dingell, set the tone for the rest of the day's speeches with a nationalist rant directed at China. Predictably, Dingell, herself a former GM executive, had nothing to say about the job cuts or the auto companies' record-breaking profits in the midst of a pandemic that has killed scores of autoworkers and more than one million people throughout the US.

Spouting the nationalism long promoted by the unions, Dingell declared it was time "to bring back our supply chain back to America." She complained that 80-90 percent of medicines were produced in China, along with computer microchips and other critical components. "I am not going to let China beat us at anything. America is going to lead the world," she said.

This takes place as Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi prepares a provocative visit to Taiwan, a move calculated to further ratchet up tensions with China and greatly increase the risk of war between nuclear

powers.

Other featured speakers Tuesday included AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and the Reverend Wendell Anthony, president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP. Outside of ritualistic paeans to the trade unions, both focused their remarks almost entirely on the need to get out the vote for the Democratic Party in the upcoming November elections.

However, amidst her feigned optimism, Shuler nervously acknowledged the breakdown in support for all the capitalist state institutions, including the Democratic Party. “Don’t think negative, don’t give up, fight back!” she exhorted.

The main conference business of the day was the debate and vote on resolutions and constitutional amendments. The group Unite All Workers for Democracy attempted and failed by wide margins to get several changes to the constitution adopted. One amendment called for UAW retirees to be permitted to run for International Executive Board positions in the first direct vote for top officers in the union. The second amendment would have banned the negotiation of multitiered wage structures in future contracts.

Bill Parker, former president of UAW Local 1700 at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant, introduced the motion on the amendment to ban tiered wages in negotiations. The resolution was largely pro forma, since it would do nothing to eliminate the hundreds of concessionary contracts already in place at virtually every UAW-represented workplace. However, even a verbal pledge to end tiers was too much for the UAW executives.

The resolution banning tiers had been among scores submitted to the UAW Constitution Committee, staffed entirely with appointees of the Curry leadership, but the committee had arbitrarily decided not to bring it to a vote.

While the supporters of the amendment won the right to bring the resolution to the floor by mustering support from 15 percent of the delegates, it was quickly clear that it would be easily voted down.

In the discussion, speakers for the administrative caucus argued that a ban on tiers would “tie the hands” of the union in negotiations. Estrada then tried to quickly end discussion and force a vote, a flagrant violation of the rules, as one delegate pointed out, since Parker had not even been allowed to speak in favor of

his own resolution.

In his letter to delegates, Lehman wrote that the corruption scandal that has engulfed the UAW “is merely one expression of the complete integration of the UAW apparatus into corporate management, the obliteration of all distinctions between the company and the union.”

Lehman appealed to delegates to nominate him on Wednesday, stating that his campaign is aimed at developing “a movement of the rank and file to end the dictatorship of the apparatus over the workers and create the conditions for a real fight of workers against exploitation and inequality.”



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