“25 percent doesn’t make up for what we’ve lost since the last contract”: Workers denounce UAW-Ford deal

Our reporter
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Join an emergency meeting Friday, October 27, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern / 6:00 p.m. Central to discuss the implications of the UAW-Ford deal and how to organize to defeat the sellout. Register here to attend.

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As workers learn more details about the tentative agreement the United Auto Workers has reached with Ford, disgust and anger is building inside plants across the country. UAW President Shawn Fain, who announced the deal via a 10-minute video Wednesday night, called the deal “historic,” even though it did not meet any of the rank-and-file’s core demands, which the UAW claimed to be fighting for.

Even before Ford workers had seen, let alone voted on the deal, Fain ordered 16,600 of them engaged in isolated “stand up strikes” to return to work in Michigan, Illinois and Kentucky. This was cynically presented as a means of pressuring GM and Stellantis to agree to similar terms as Ford. In fact, by ending picketing, the UAW apparatus is running roughshod over the rights of workers and trying to make it seem like ratification of this sellout agreement is a foregone conclusion.

Despite the propaganda blitz by the UAW, corporate media and the Biden administration, rank-and-file opposition is already emerging. This was apparent even on the UAW International’s own Facebook page.

One worker commented under Fain’s video, “I’ve never heard of anyone going back to work before they see the agreement and vote on it!!! That’s just crazy!!!”

Another said, “Why [does] his tune sound so different from last week? Only thing changed was a 2 percent increase smh. We could have negotiated this without being on strike.”

Another commented, “You think it’s good for us? I’ve went through more than eight years and made them profits and I work for them and can’t afford one of their products. It’s been owed to us! They will still make their money! We haven’t won anything. What they gave has benefited them. They only gave up what benefits them. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. I love my brothers and sisters. You choose!!”

“It’s a No for me,” another wrote. “We need at least 35% and pension for the new hires! I have 26 yrs. But no one should work a factory job without getting a pension!”

Another posted, “So as a Union we’re saying it’s OK for half what we asked initially? What happened behind closed doors? What happened when this was the offer last week? What happened to us truly standing and not settling for less? Instead of half ‘assing’ what we stood for?”

Still another commented, “11% at ratification is a slap in the face. Same union it’s always been. Sellouts.”

A Ford Chicago Assembly worker said, “I was out there picketing last Wednesday when it was raining and cold, and the wind put the fires out and my car wouldn’t start. Then I hear today it’s over, and we didn’t even get half of what we were on strike for. I feel like the union isn’t fighting for the people. When I heard that the UAW was ready to go out on strike and then they only called out some plants, I saw the companies had him [Fain] in their pockets.”

She added, “The union says they’re about solidarity, but they don’t mean it when they do something like this. Now it’s like, where do we go from here? If we had all gone out on strike, we wouldn’t have even had to be out there three weeks.”

A WSWS reporting team spoke to workers at the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan, outside Detroit and distributed hundreds of copies of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, which contained an assessment of the Ford sellout, as well as a statement opposing the Biden administration’s efforts to make the working class pay for an additional $105 billion in military spending.

While some workers were swayed by the claims of a “record contract,” others were angry over what little they knew about the deal. “From what I see, we are not profiting anything. There should have been an all-out strike from the beginning. It is not fair to those getting $500 a week. It’s just not fair. My recommendation? Don’t sign the contract.”

A veteran worker on his way in for the night shift at the Dearborn Truck Plant exclaimed, “This is a bunch of crap! A lousy 25 percent doesn’t make up for what we’ve lost since the last contract. We will have to chase inflation for 4-1/2 years!

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He (Fain) doesn't know what he's doing. Biden is praising him, and the media is praising him like a genius. That is nonsense! We have to reject this!"

Another worker on his way into the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center (REV-C) said, "The union is a sellout. They knew what they were going to do a long time ago. They are just sweeping our demands under the rug and getting money for themselves on the backend."

Still others denounced the deterioration of conditions in the plant and the destruction of their living standards by inflation. "Everybody is just so exhausted working 10.7 hours a day through the week and mandatory overtime on Saturdays," a young mother said on her way into the REV-C facility. "I don't want to work more than eight hours. Overtime is supposed to be voluntary."

The worker told WSWS reporters that she could not afford to pay her bills with the wages she was getting. "Rent is $1,500, and electricity $400 a month. All I'm making after two years is $18 an hour. They should be worried about a rebellion by the rank and file. I could go to Target or Amazon, and make the same money."

A spokesman for the GM Lansing Workers Rank-and-File Committee denounced the Ford agreement and the forcing of workers back to work before they see the contract. "What if they vote no? They will be working without a contract. It doesn't make sense, and it's unfair to people not to have to read the contract. It used to be 'no contract, no deal.' Now they want you to work with no contract.

"There are too many vague areas; it's not set out in black and white, so they can change things. What will we lose with the next contract then?

"The UAW leaders will do everything to get it passed. I couldn't believe it passed at GM in 2019, especially, when most people were saying they voted 'no.' It's like Will Lehman and everyone in the other rank-and-file committees said, we need oversight of the vote counting; just like with strike pay, where we register everyone. There should be oversight by the rank-and-file committees.

"Why not livestream these negotiations? That way there are no backroom deals. The rank-and-file committee should be there so there is representation for us! So other people know what is going on instead of just Fain and the company."

WSWS reporters also spoke to workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit Thursday afternoon. Many temporary workers at the plant have been laid off over the last several weeks, in many cases imposing intense hardship on these workers in a move clearly intended to make them susceptable to vote for a deal because of the signing bonus.

Most workers were only just learning of the settlement and took copies of the *Autoworker Newsletter* to read the analysis. A number reacted strongly, "It is going to be voted down. We should have all walked out. They are ending the strike before it began," said one veteran worker.

Another veteran worker said that what he had seen about the Ford deal was that it was a sellout. "It is BS. I have been here for years. I know what is going on."

A younger Warren Truck worker said his brother worked at Ford and told him on the phone that everyone there was voting "no." When asked his opinion of the contract, he first said, "At least we got something," but after discussing with the WSWS reporter, he agreed the deal was not what workers wanted. "All of us should have walked out. We wanted to fight. We should have fought harder."

He said he was concerned younger workers might vote "yes" because of the signing bonus and up-front wage increase. "They are struggling so hard."

Another said, "Of everything that was promised, we didn't even get half. People are disillusioned. Everyone is living paycheck to paycheck."

A striking worker at the Stellantis Jeep complex in Toledo said he had heard from workers he knew at Ford Michigan Assembly that there was strong opposition already to the agreement. They were angry that the money had simply been moved around, from signing bonus to the wage increase. "They are going to vote 'no' overwhelmingly," he said. "It's garbage, they are still not there. It is not a record contract. I really hope they vote it down."

He added, "They should have never pulled the picket signs down like that. I have never seen the union make a move like that before." Speaking about the claimed 33 percent cumulative wage increase touted by Fain, he said, "They shouldn't factor COLA in the wage increase. That is trick math. The signing bonus is less money than in the other contracts."

To mobilize opposition and ensure the defeat of this pro-company contract, workers must join and build rank-and-file committees at every auto plant. The campaign to defeat the sellout must be combined with a strategy to launch a real struggle to meet workers' demands, including an all-out strike against the Detroit Three auto companies.

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