

Vote NO on the UAW-backed sellout contracts at Ford, GM and Stellantis!

Jerry White
30 October 2023

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on autoworkers at Ford, GM and Stellantis to reject the sellout contracts supported by the United Auto Workers apparatus. We urge workers to establish rank-and-file committees to fight for the broadest possible “no” vote and prepare a real struggle to win workers’ demands.

The UAW announced a tentative agreement with General Motors Monday morning after announcing similar deals over the past few days with Ford and Stellantis. UAW President Shawn Fain, US President Joe Biden and the corporate media issued the inevitable declarations that the contracts are “historic” (Fain and Biden), “reward autoworkers who gave up much” (Biden) and “give workers the biggest pay raises in decades” (*New York Times*).

These are a pack of lies. The UAW’s bogus “stand up strikes” were tightly scripted to conclude with deals that in fact had already been agreed to long ago. Barely a third of the UAW membership at the Big Three was called out on strike at the widest point of the “stand up strikes” last Tuesday. For most of the time after the Big Three contracts expired on September 14, 80-90 percent of autoworkers were ordered to stay on the job, working without contracts.

In a final burst of theatrics before the agreements were announced, the UAW called out a small number of larger, more profitable plants, shutting them down after a handful of days or less. Workers were ordered to end their pickets at these plants before there was any impact on the inventories the companies had built up.

All of this was designed in advance by the UAW leadership and the Biden administration to have as little effect on corporate profits as possible. Topping off this charade, the UAW apparatus shut down all strikes immediately after announcing their agreements, before workers even had a chance to see, let alone vote, on them.

What is actually in these supposed “record” contracts?

• **Wage increases that do not make up for past concessions.** The contract includes a cumulative 25 percent wage increase spread over four and a half years, far below the demand by workers for a 40-46 percent raise that Fain

previously claimed he was fighting for. Given that the Consumer Price Index has risen by 22 percent since the last contract in 2019, the raises do not represent an advance, only barely offsetting the rise in the cost of living over the past four years. By the end of the contract, base pay will rise to just over \$40 an hour—likely below what autoworkers made in 2007 when inflation is factored in.

• **Inadequate Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA).** The companies have agreed to restore the 2009 COLA formula, which was not a full inflation offset, only compensating workers for a fraction of the real decline in their purchasing power. To add insult to injury, for each quarterly COLA increase the amount going to workers will be reduced by 10 cents, supposedly to cover the corporations’ higher healthcare costs.

• **Two-tier wages and benefits not abolished.** The deal does not eliminate tiers—a core demand of workers. It only shortens the wage progression for second-tier workers from eight to three years. Company-paid pensions and retiree health benefits for second tier workers, given up by the UAW in 2007, have not been restored.

• **The continued abuse of temporary workers.** The UAW’s deals would continue the virtually unlimited use of these highly exploited workers. Under the UAW’s agreement with Ford, pay for temps would be frozen at \$21 through 2028. While the UAW has said new temps at Ford would be converted to full-time status after nine months of “continuous service” (subject to numerous loopholes), little has been said about temps’ “path” to full-time employment at GM and Stellantis. UAW Local 598 officials in Flint have admitted that GM will only roll over current “temporary full-time employees” not “temporary part-time employees,” directly contradicting Fain’s claims that all temps with 90 days of service would be immediately converted to full-time positions.

• **Most importantly, the deal will pave the way for the decimation of jobs as the auto industry converts to electric vehicle production.** Whatever additional costs in wages the companies pay will be more than made up

through forced retirements, mass layoffs and plant closures. The UAW's claims that it won "the right to strike over plant closures" is meaningless, given the bureaucracy's nearly half-century of collusion in factory closures and mass layoffs.

The UAW bureaucracy has deliberately concealed the number of factories Ford and the other corporations plan to close in the next few years and the massive concessions they plans to wrench out of workers to "save" remaining plants. But new signs are already emerging of the massive attack on jobs the companies intend to carry out.

A letter to UAW Vice President for Ford Chuck Browning buried in the UAW's contract changes, with the subject "Zone 1 staffing needs," states, "Effective no later than December 1, 2023, the entire Rouge complex will be considered surplus" and eligible "for voluntary job posting opportunities" at other plants.

Another letter to Browning, "TEVC Transfer Opportunities," states that "the parties discussed the interest of finding job placements for surplus UAW employees," again specifically referring to workers at Rouge, stating they would be "allowed" to transfer to Ford's planned EV plant in Tennessee, which is not scheduled to begin operations until 2025 and is hundreds of miles away from Dearborn. Earlier this month, billionaire company chairman William Clay Ford Jr. threatened the future of the giant Rouge complex at a speech at the facility.

By a "just transition" to EVs, the UAW bureaucracy does not mean defending the jobs of workers; it means defending the financial and institutional interests of the union apparatus itself, including collecting dues from the low-paid workers in the new battery plants. Workers would not be agreeing to a contract; they would be signing their death warrant.

And while production workers at the new battery plants will nominally be covered by the national UAW master agreement, the union is giving the corporations a free hand to do whatever they want. At the new BlueOval Battery Park in Michigan, the UAW has granted Ford numerous exceptions, including outside contracting, gutting job classifications, imposing "flexible" schedules and a lean-manufacturing culture.

The more workers study the nearly 900-page contracts, the more rotten agreements will be discovered. Significantly, the UAW has sought to keep an additional 50 pages of "administrative letters" from workers at Ford, which further detail the incestuous, corporatist relationship between the union apparatus and the company. One "Administrative Letter" notes that "an appropriate portion of lump-sum payments" and "profit sharing" checks to workers will be funneled to the UAW in the form of union dues, and that Ford will continue to fund the UAW bureaucracy through

the renamed UAW-Ford Joint Trusts Center.

All of this makes clear that the "contracts" that the UAW is pushing at GM, Stellantis and Ford are a joint conspiracy against workers. In Canada, the Unifor union is playing a similar role, announcing an agreement with Stellantis Monday after a farcical "strike" of just a few hours which had no impact on production.

Under Fain, the so-called "union reformer" promoted by the Democratic Socialists of America, the UAW bureaucracy is going further than ever to integrate itself into the ruling class's economic war against China—in which EV production and supply chains are major battleground—and the Biden administration's efforts to prevent the class struggle from interfering with its plans for global military conquest.

Rank-and-file workers have the power to defeat this conspiracy. There is already significant opposition to the UAW's deals, as evidenced in the hundreds of comments by workers calling for "no" votes on the UAW's livestream Sunday evening.

But to succeed, this opposition must be organized. The following immediate measures should be taken by workers:

- **Exchange information on the details of the UAW's deals**, circulating them widely on social media and in the plants, and demand the full release of all the UAW's side letters.

- **Organize committees to oversee the vote and ballot counting** and prevent the UAW from rigging the vote.

- **Build support for a powerful and overwhelming rejection of the sellout contracts**, campaigning against the deals at local union meetings, on breaks and shift changes.

- **Expand the network of rank-and-file committees** to each factory and workplace, following the lead of the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which organized the defeat of the UAW's concessionary deal earlier this month.

There is no time to lose! To overcome the UAW's betrayal, rank-and-file organizations genuinely under the control of workers are needed, which will take power out of the hands of the union bureaucracy and place it in the hands of the rank and file.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact