

“They kept saying ‘This is the best we could do’”: Flint GM workers denounce UAW’s bogus “informational” meetings

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The United Auto Workers is organizing local “informational meetings” on its proposed agreements with Ford, GM and Stellantis. UAW President Shawn Fain has claimed the meetings will provide workers the opportunity to question local union leaders on the deals so they can “make the most informed decision” when they vote.

But the workers who attended meetings organized by UAW Local 598 in Flint, Michigan, on Tuesday told reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* that local union officials dodged their questions and arrogantly denounced anyone who opposed the deal.

Contrary to the wall-to-wall media propaganda praising the agreements, the proposed contracts at all the automakers fail to address workers’ needs and pave the way for massive attack on jobs as the industry transitions to electric vehicle production.

Even with the all-out efforts to sell the agreements, opposition among workers has been building. On Tuesday, UAW Local 163 announced that GM Romulus Powertrain workers voted by 51 percent to reject the contract. The Michigan engine plant employs nearly 1,200 workers.

Although there are more than 4,500 UAW members who work at GM’s Flint Assembly Plant, only a few hundred attended the UAW’s informational meetings. The majority saw no reason to subject themselves to more deception from union officials.

The meeting was run by UAW Local 598 President Ryan Buchalski and Plant Chairman Eric Welter, workers reported. “Right off the bat, they said they weren’t going to go over the details of the deal and made it clear they wanted to get the meeting over as fast as possible,” one worker who attended the meeting told the WSW.

“Some temporary part-time workers wanted to know when they would be converted to temporary full-time and then to a regular position. Welter gave a convoluted answer, saying there were only a few ways, including if a full-time seniority worker goes on medical leave. It was clear there is no real pathway.

“Fain said tiers and the abuse of temps would be ended. But

not all temps are being hired in, and they will be subject to conditions that may never materialize. There is a possibility they will become full-time if they are not laid off.”

“The officials talked down to anyone who was opposed to the contract”

Another related an angry exchange between a rank-and-file worker and union officials over the lack of vacation time. “He complained that it takes 20 years to get 200 hours of vacation and said that wasn’t fair. When he asked the union officials what the ‘work-life balance improvements’ in the contract highlights were, they said a new committee was being set up to ‘explore’ the problem. The worker replied, ‘In other words, you got nothing.’

“The officials talked down to anyone who was opposed to the contract. There was a large guy standing near the microphone, and I assume he was ready to grab the mic from anyone who really challenged them.”

“Workers wanted to know why the union accepted the inadequate pay raises and COLA payments they did,” another young worker told WSW reporters after leaving one of the meetings. “The union guys kept saying, ‘This is the best we could do.’ [GM CEO Mary] Barra is making \$29 million, and they’re telling us this is the best they could do?”

“I was thinking of voting for this at first. But now we’re learning that only the temporary full-time workers, not the temporary part-time workers, are getting rolled over to full-time. Plus, this nine-month wait to get converted can take a lot longer if a temp is laid off. And Barra says she wants to cut employment and costs. Now, I’m feeling I’m going to vote ‘no.’”

His friend added, “There was a lady who was angry over the wage increases, saying that she and other older workers hadn’t gotten a real raise in more than 20 years. The union officials said she was being ‘disrespectful’ to try to shut her down. But

all she was doing was telling the truth.

“We need to have the full details, but they won’t give them to us. The union is part of management. You can tell they are colluding with the bosses. They don’t care about the workers on the floor. Just a few weeks ago Fain was saying, ‘We’re not going to take these garbage offers,’ then suddenly he announces deals with all three companies. Workers questioned the local union officials about Fain dropping our demands, and they were saying, ‘That was Fain who promised you that, not us.’”

“How can you win a strike if most of the workers are still in the plants? Flint and Fort Wayne [Indiana] make Silverado pickups, GM’s top-selling vehicle. But we were never called out. In fact, they sped the line up and hit record goals.”

“I’m going to vote ‘no’ because of the TPTs”

Another worker who attended a meeting said, “Workers asked the union leaders what happens if we vote this down? Are we all going out on strike? They said, ‘We don’t have a plan for that. We’ll probably go back to the members and ask them what they didn’t like,’ he said. That sounds like they won’t call a strike. That’s BS.”

“This contract is almost as good as the one in 2019—and that was crap,” a second-tier worker said sarcastically. “The UAW always tells us these deals are ‘great’ to get us to buy them. When I retire, I’m not going to have a pension.”

“I’m going to vote ‘no’ because of the TPTs,” a younger worker going into the plant for the second shift told the WSWS. “Fain said all the temporary workers would be converted to full-time, but then they backtracked, saying only the temporary full-time workers. I’ve been a temp for more than two years and there are at least 500 TPTs behind me in seniority. What’s going to happen if we get laid off?”

A part-time temp added, “I think a lot of folks are voting this down. I’ve been working two jobs for the majority of the two years I’ve been here. That’s what the UAW thinks of me. That I’m not worthy enough to be able to make an honest living. They want me on my knees.

“Fain was talking crap and then acted like this was the deal of the century. All the while, he was being ridiculously disingenuous. He let GM off the hook.”

“I’m a big hell no,” said a veteran worker. “There is nothing in the contract for the legacy workers and the retirees. We have not gotten back what we lost in 2009. We haven’t gotten all that we could.”

“I see those children being killed and it’s sickening”

Workers were also concerned about the broader issues facing the working class, including the huge social inequality in America, highlighted by the vast gap between the pay of top CEOs like Mary Barra and workers on the plant floor, and Biden’s support for the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

“I see those children being killed and it’s sickening,” said the veteran worker. “America is always getting involved where we don’t belong. I don’t want more wars. We have so many problems here.”

A young worker added, “The government has an agenda, and they use smoke and mirrors to lie about what is behind these wars. America is always trying to bully and control other countries and their resources.”

The WSWS reporters spoke to workers about the statement by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network, which calls on workers to reject the sellout agreements. The statement, which is signed by the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee and other committees, calls on workers to:

- Exchange information with each other on the hidden clauses in the contract, including on job cuts, the continuation of temp work, punitive changes in attendance policy and other areas.
- At the coming “informational meetings” workers must demand the right to speak and get answers to all their questions.
- Workers should propose and vote on a resolution demanding an additional week to review and discuss the contracts.
- At the meetings, committees of trusted workers should be elected to oversee the ratification process and prevent any manipulation of the votes.
- Resolutions should also be proposed and passed that declare that the defeat of the contract at any of the automakers will result in an immediate all-out strike by all 146,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers.



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