

As challenges to UAW votes continue, media declares “contentious voting” over

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There is a palpable sigh of relief in many of the media reports about the supposed ratification of the United Auto Workers deals with the Big Three automakers. Even though challenges to the legitimacy of the vote, particularly at General Motors, are ongoing, the media has declared the process over and the contracts ratified.

On Monday morning, the UAW announced ratification of its agreements at the Big Three while ignoring the broad opposition to the deals even according to its official numbers. The announcement followed several days of unexplained delay and media silence by the UAW. Voting at General Motors had concluded last Thursday, followed by Ford and Stellantis.

At GM, workers are expected to appeal ratification over a number of violations of UAW rules. Among the most significant, the UAW counted votes from Ultium battery and GM Subsystems in reaching its overall “ratification” of the GM national contract, even though workers at these facilities were not GM employees at the time of the vote.

At other companies, workers have reported being forced to vote inside their plants where they could be observed by management. Questions have also been raised about the “chain of custody” of the ballot boxes at GM Arlington. Arlington was the last of the major GM assembly plants to vote, and the UAW reported a large “yes” vote at it, in contrast to the increasingly large “no” votes at other assembly plants in the preceding days.

Ignoring all this, the *Detroit News* declared, “The majority votes backing the tentative agreements mark mission accomplished for the union, its first set of directly elected leaders and its campaign to publicize the talks and promote the labor movement.” The *Wall Street Journal* added, “The close of voting will mark a major milestone for the UAW, after contentious negotiations that began earlier this year led to a roughly six-week strike.”

According to the UAW ratification vote tracker, 67.4 percent of production workers at Ford and 66.8 percent of

production workers at Stellantis backed the deal, prompting the news media to declare that the deals won popular support from workers. The media pundits were largely at a loss to explain why thousands of workers at Ford’s giant Kentucky Truck Plant and Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex overwhelmingly voted down the deals, which the media, echoing UAW President Shawn Fain, has hailed as “historic” and “life-changing” for workers.

Nor could they give a viable explanation why GM workers at seven of the company’s 11 assembly plants voted it down, and, why, according to the UAW’s own dubious numbers, it passed by a narrow margin of 53.2-46.7 percent, with 14,429 out of 30,860 production workers voting it down.

As the WSWS wrote last week, “Nothing that has been announced by the UAW bureaucracy can be trusted. To get to the truth, it is necessary to conduct an audit of the vote, including an investigation of how the ballots were handled. This audit must be conducted under the supervision of committees of trusted rank-and-file workers, elected from the shop floor. Rank-and-file committees should gather testimony from workers on irregularities and instances of intimidation.”

The industry publication *Automotive News* has expressed concern over rank-and-file opposition to the sellout deals. Although the automakers say the new deals with the UAW “make working in their factories pay better than 70 percent of other U.S. jobs—in all fields, not just manufacturing,” the industry publication said, “But more than 35,000 of the automakers’ hourly workers still voted no.” It noted that “GM’s contract passed by fewer than 3,300 votes—less than half the margin for a far less lucrative deal in 2019” and pointed to the large “no” votes at the Kentucky Ford and Ohio Stellantis plants.

Automotive News continued, “The discontent highlights the elevated expectations among members during this particularly bitter round of negotiations. A desire for better retirement benefits and even higher wages for top earners were among the points of contention expressed as workers voted at union halls across the country this month.”

As it has for more than four decades, the UAW bureaucracy resorted to lies, threats and likely outright vote-rigging to get the contracts passed. In addition, it exploited the economic desperation created by endless UAW-backed concessions to present its meager and thoroughly inadequate pay raises and meager improvements as “record contracts.” As one Stellantis worker at the Detroit Assembly Complex told the WSWS, “The UAW set the bar so low they could present what little they got as ‘record’ contracts.”

This was confirmed by Marick Masters, a management professor at Wayne State University with close ties to the corporations and the UAW who was quoted widely in the corporate media. Masters said, “While the gains may not have recouped all of the losses they suffered during 15 painful years of retrenchment in the industry, they were starting from a very low base and got as much as they could in this round of negotiations—more than people thought was attainable at the beginning.”

Bloomberg, for its part, grasped for straws to prove the “historic” nature of the UAW deal, writing:

The United Auto Workers union’s tentative agreements with Detroit’s three automakers include a new benefit: two weeks of paid parental leave for full-time employees. That’s almost nothing compared to what workers in other rich nations receive. But it’s significant in other ways.

Bloomberg notes that the US has no nationally mandated paid time off for new parents, and only about a quarter of American private-sector workers have access to the benefit. Two weeks is far less than what’s available in Europe and Asia, where workers by law can get six months or even more than a year, the article continues. “It also pales in comparison to the leave for salaried workers at General Motors Co., which can be as much as 12 weeks. It’s nevertheless a step up for the roughly 146,000 UAW members covered by the agreements and their families.”

“Compared to other countries, two weeks seems paltry, but compared to other workers in the US, it’s hugely significant,” said Rebecca Givan, associate professor at Rutgers University’s School of Management and Labor Relations.

In fact, the new deals will ensure that workers will continue to be subjected to brutally long work schedules, including more punitive attendance policies to punish workers for taking time off from back-breaking and soul-crushing working conditions.

Most importantly, the deals will pave the way for the

purging of thousands of higher paid workers through “voluntary employment termination” buyouts that have already been emailed to workers. Inevitably, buyouts will be followed by mass layoffs and plant closures as the UAW bureaucracy collaborates in the jobs massacre the corporations plan as part of their transition to electric vehicle production. GM, for example, is currently engaged in a \$2 billion-a-year cost-cutting campaign, more than double what it expects to pay out in additional labor costs from the new contract.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Stellantis is about to offer a new round of buyouts to roughly half of its US white-collar employees, “as the company continues to cut expenses amid an expensive transition to electric vehicles and higher labor costs from a pending new union contract.” The “voluntary separation packages” will be offered to 6,400 white-collar workers with at least five years of experience. This is the third round of buyouts, following offers to 2,500 salaried workers in April 2023 and one in October 2022.

A Ford Chicago worker who attended a call-in meeting Sunday, sponsored by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network, said, “The UAW International are crooks and liars. They want us to get into a battle between plants to lower wages and boost profits. They have not gotten anything for us in these contracts. Fain and his flunkies should come back to the shop floor and see what it is like for us.

“People who voted ‘yes’ on this contract are going to quickly see they were lied to. They are not going to be happy. These CEOs are cutting jobs, bringing in outside contractors to write you up for safety violations to fire you and even taking your chairs so you can sit while you’re working. As for the UAW, they don’t care about anything but getting their members’ dues money.”



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