

“They sold us out again!”

Autoworkers denounce UAW-GM tentative agreement

Our reporters
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Autoworkers at GM are denouncing the tentative agreement (TA) announced by the United Auto Workers this week. The 48,000 striking workers will remain on the picket lines this coming week, as the UAW organizes “informational meetings” and votes to be completed by Friday.

The contract maintains the hated multi-tier wage and benefit system and creates the conditions for expanding the use of temporary workers. It sanctions the closure of four facilities, including Lordstown Assembly and Baltimore and Warren Transmission. It includes just two three-percent wage increases over the life of the contract, inadequate to keep pace with inflation and rising living costs.

Workers on the picket line at Warren Tech in Warren, Michigan reacted with skepticism to the efforts of the UAW to present the agreement as a major victory. One commented, “Until the contract is read and ratified by the membership, we should not go back into the plant.”

Another worker wrote in to the *Autoworker Newsletter*: “I’ve done a few polls [of other workers] and don’t believe that support is behind it. Three years consecutively for temps [to be hired as regular employees] means they can be laid off for 32 days every 2.5 years and never be hired [full-time]. Even if GM did not intend this, the auto industry is too fickle.

“The lower-tier workers are told we’ll wait four years to get max pay because eight years was unacceptable. The union then happened to be the ones who offered a contract that left most of us still waiting for eight years, and we won’t get the two bonuses. My vote is ‘no.’”

An autoworker with decades at GM Wentzville Assembly in the St. Louis, Missouri area said, “Most older employees say we are screwed. Everyone agrees with what [the *Autoworker Newsletter*] was saying,” she

continued. “They sold us out again and sent us that bull as if they were really working out a great deal.”

A Ford contract worker in Michigan said, “I think the WSWS is spot on. It’s preposterous that we are not all on strike.

“In regard to the contract, nobody knows anything about it. My experience is that they [only] give highlights. We’re going to lose healthcare, wages and everything else we fought for. With 18 months of negotiations, they are against us.”

John, a full-time Fiat-Chrysler (FCA) worker, said, “[GM workers] should have gotten more in this contract for as hard as we work in these plants. It’s a capitalist country, and it’s all about taking money off of the poor man.

“Yes, the UAW is supposed to represent the workers, but instead they are stealing from the workers. I agree with forming rank-and-file committees. Instead of getting these pencil-pushers, let the people themselves vote and decide. Wall Street runs this country, and we’ve got to change that.”

Asked about the deal allowing the plant closures to go forward, including a phony promise about the Hamtramck plant, John said, “I remember when they built [General Motors] Hamtramck. They burnt the whole area out just to build it, and now they want to shut it down. It makes no sense.”

Teshawn, a second-tier GM worker at Romulus Powertrain in Michigan, denounced the TA as a betrayal of strikers’ aspirations. He said, “It’s not what anyone really wanted or expected. I think a lot of members were hopeful that ... tier two would go straight to full pay. It’s the longest strike that the UAW has been on since the 1970s, and in the end we’re just getting the shaft again.

“The fact that the TA does nothing for temps is terrible.

GM treats temps the worst. When I started at Romulus, they were only allowed to work temps Mondays and Friday, but now they're allowed to work four days a week. Even traditional employees are sick of seeing that [temp] workers are making half of what they make or less. One man was a temp on-and-off for six years, which shows the games they play with people."

Teshawn denounced the corporatist nature of the UAW, stating, "My union committeeperson on the floor will go and speak to the managers and supervision before they talk to me. The UAW is a major stockholder of GM. How can you have two masters?"

"In my opinion the UAW needs to be reformed or replaced. We're being exploited and losing tons of perks that we shouldn't be losing. Everyone thinks we got screwed bad, and we're still getting screwed."

Regarding the TA's sanctioning of plant closures, he continued, "I think the closures are horrible. These people were promised jobs, and they're forced to move across the country. GM made \$35 billion, record profits the last three years. They can do better than that for these people, especially when they take taxpayers' money to bail out the company."

After discussing the international character of the auto industry and the need for a broader global strategy, John declared, "For a long time I've been thinking that we need international unity. People have to organize, that's the only way, but people have been scared to do this in the past. It should be all of us out there. The same strike fund they soaked up before and used for their own pockets. They've been paying us a starvation wage in strike pay."

A Canadian autoworker wrote to the *Autoworker Newsletter* to share a message of solidarity with class brothers and sisters across the border. "I think this latest contract is a disgrace and a slap in the face of the workers on the line. I work for a parts supplier park at General Motors in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. I am simply sickened at this latest deal that only benefits Mary Barra and her band of corrupt UAW leaders and her new best friend Donald Trump.

"I am simply lost as to why these historic high quality output plants cannot be retooled and or retrofitted to house green energy cars and trucks. I think the workers should stay out on the picket lines and not be rushed into accepting a sellout deal."

A retired, third-generation autoworker in Ohio emailed the *Autoworker Newsletter* about the GM Lordstown plant, which the UAW would allow to close under the proposed contract.

He wrote, "Lordstown, Ohio, is a symbol for a few very rich greedy hedge funds that own enough stock and corporations to hone enough power and wealth to tear families apart and destroy our communities. This is where the fight is! All of the great activists and new ones yet to join a large scale fight have a moment to seize."

GM workers must now draw the appropriate lessons and take the initiative out of the hands of the UAW.

A "no" vote is necessary. But that by itself is insufficient. The urgent task for autoworkers is to form rank-and-file factory committees to take control of the struggle. These committees should make the following demands:

- No vote without time to study the contract! Workers must demand access to the full contract, not just the bogus "highlights," and be given at least a full week to study it before voting. Workers should hold broad, democratic discussions on the contract, outside of the view and control of the union.

- For rank-and-file oversight of the balloting process! Autoworkers should insist that their rank-and-file committees have the authority to oversee voting, to ensure that there is no ballot-stuffing or vote-rigging, as is widely believed to have occurred during the ratification of the Ford contract in 2015.

- Expand the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler! Unite with the working class of different countries! Rank-and-file committees should be based on the principle of internationalism—that workers everywhere have the same basic interests.

- Committees should formulate their own demands for the strike, including a 40 percent pay raise, the restoration of COLA for current and retired workers, the abolition of the multi-tier wage and benefit system, the immediate conversion of all temps into full-time workers with full wages and benefits, the reopening of all closed plants and the rehiring of laid-off workers.

- Autoworkers must defend the courageous GM workers in Silao, Mexico and demand the rehiring of those fired for supporting the US strike.

The WSWS urges all workers to contact us for assistance in carrying out this struggle.



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