

# UAW sanctions plant closing, expansion of temps in deal with Ford

By Shannon Jones  
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The Ford UAW council comprised of local officials at Ford facilities gave its approval Friday to a sellout contract patterned along the lines of the General Motors agreement. Voting is scheduled to be completed by November 15.

While full details have not been released, what has been revealed demonstrates that it is a concessionary agreement tailored to the demands of Ford and Wall Street. This includes maintaining the two-tier wage system and giving a green light to the expanded use of temporary, part time and contract workers.

The contract will further facilitate the restructuring of the auto industry into a low wage sector, with an increasing percentage of contingent workers paid barely above poverty wages and denied basic benefits and rights.

Even as the UAW announced the Ford contract, the UAW leadership faced another indictment this week. Edward Robinson, an official in UAW Region 5, was accused of working with “Official A” and others to steal \$1.5 million from UAW dues income to fund personal expenses on luxury items. “Official A” is reported to be UAW President Gary Jones.

The UAW and corporate media launched their campaign for contract ratification with the typical bombast. In a statement following the council vote, Jones said, “UAW Ford members have created an environment for growth in products and jobs, and a serious commitment by Ford Motor Company to grow their footprint right here in the U.S.”

“This contract continues a strong pattern that gives all workers a path to traditional wages and maintains the job security and benefits our members deserve.”

In the face of an unbroken record of betrayals and concessions contracts by the UAW, this will convince no one. In UAW doublespeak, creating an

“environment for growth in products and jobs” means helping Ford slash costs in order to increase its profits.

Even if one takes at face value the self-serving “summary” being distributed by the UAW, the contract is another major attack on autoworkers.

Far from increasing jobs, the agreement sanctions the closure of the Romeo, Michigan engine plant employing 600 workers.

A report in the *Detroit Free Press* claims those workers will be offered buyouts or the chance to transfer to the Sterling Heights, Michigan transmission plant. However, the contract summary distributed by the UAW does not stipulate any guarantee of re-employment for laid off workers. Instead, those set to lose their jobs will be eligible for a one-time termination payment or “tuition assistance.”

The Ford deal includes two inadequate three percent pay raises, supplemented with two four percent lump sum payments in alternate years that are not folded into hourly wages.

Like the GM contract, the Ford agreement contains a bogus “pathway” for temporary workers to reach full time status beginning in 2020. Part time workers will get a pathway to regular status in 2021. As with the GM contract, however, this “pathway” will be full of loopholes. Workers will have to work three years without being laid off more than 30 days to be eligible for conversion. Otherwise the clock starts over.

Ford will be allowed to use temps and part time workers in excess of eight percent of the workforce only with UAW approval. This means in practice that the UAW will sanction the expanded use of temporary employees.

While the UAW summary claims that there will be no additional health care costs, the cuts to health care will be realized through the expansion of temporary

and “in-progression” (second tier), workers. The latter receive substandard health care even after they reach the top pay rate for so-called “legacy” workers, which for many will not be until 2023.

The contract also maintains the substandard pay scale at the Sterling Axle and Rawsonville plants in Michigan. Base pay at these facilities starts at just \$16.25 an hour and tops out at \$22.50 an hour. In an additional twist of the knife, those workers already at the top rate will not be eligible for the 4 percent “performance bonus” due in December 2019.

The agreement contains a worthless “moratorium” on plant closings (except for Romeo engine). A similar “moratorium” in the UAW-GM contract did not stop the UAW from sanctioning the closure of four facilities in the latest contract, including Lordstown Assembly.

The UAW says Ford is committing to over \$6 billion in product investments that will “create or keep over 8,500 jobs,” without specifying the number of new jobs. The agreement calls for a “Flat Rock viability strategy for a new product,” or in plain language, blackmail demands for further concessions to keep the plant open. It also refers to a proposal for “Buffalo Stamping Plant Competitiveness.”

Reacting to the deal to close the Romeo plant, one autoworker posted on Facebook, “I call BS. What happens when they move the workers and then reopen Romeo as a shell company, and they do the same work for 1/3 the price just to make larger profit margins. They did this in Saline 8 years ago and relocated over 1,000 jobs. That place is running around the clock now, but yeah they, didn't have work for us and had to close.”

The UAW only narrowly secured ratification of the GM contract following a 40-day strike. GM management and Wall Street hailed that deal, which ensured an increase in the number of temp workers earning vastly inferior wages and benefits. This is to be accompanied by the driving out of better-paid “legacy” workers.

Lurking behind the summary are a host of contract language changes and “memorandums of understanding.” It has long been standard to include language giving the UAW and management the right to alter terms of the agreement without a rank-and-file vote, a crass violation of workers rights that largely nullifies the purpose of a “contract.”

Not forgetting to line their own pockets, the UAW negotiated continued operation and funding for the UAW-Ford National Programs Centers, which has served as a conduit for hundreds of millions of dollars into UAW coffers.

The UAW is counting the example of its treachery in shutting down the GM strike to push through the Ford contract. The message is: “If you dare to vote down this agreement, you will be starved on the picket line for weeks in a strike that will result in no improvement to miserable settlement you rejected.”

To prevent this, workers must fight for the rejection of the contract and preparations for an all-out strike, mobilizing workers at GM and Fiat Chrysler as well as Ford. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW in every factory and workplace. Workers must have adequate time to examine the contract and organize opposition. Workers representatives should monitor the vote.

The UAW is not a workers organization but a corporatist syndicate, a cheap labor contractor at the service of the auto companies. Only by their own independent action and initiative can workers ensure the defeat of this contract and the defense of their jobs and living standards.

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