

Autoworkers support challenge to UAW-Ford 2015 contract vote

By Shannon Jones
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The challenge filed to the 2015 UAW-Ford contract vote by a Ford skilled trades worker at the Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan is winning support from rank-and-file autoworkers angered at the manner in which the UAW pushed through the sellout agreement last November.

Art Pedersen, a veteran worker at the Dearborn Truck Plant, is scheduled to meet Thursday with UAW Local 600 officials on his complaint, which charges serious irregularities in the conduct of the vote by the local union on November 20, 2015. Among the issues raised by Pedersen was the unexplained fact that there were exactly 500 more ballots cast for the national agreement than the local contract presented at the same time and that ballots were found folded-up in bunches in the voting box.

Pedersen also noted in his letter to Local 600 that, “there were no Privacy Booths set up for the marking of the Ballots, the Ballots were not numbered and no signatures or initials were taken as the Voters names were crossed off the Membership list.” This prevented oversight of the voting process and could facilitate fraudulent photocopying of ballots, he charged.

Pedersen also pointed to the lack of any outside, impartial oversight of the voting process. In fact the same UAW officials were counting the ballots that were out campaigning for a “yes” vote.

A second-tier worker at the Dearborn Stamping plant, also a member of Local 600, told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, “I am interested in supporting a challenge. I think the vote was rigged. They did the vote in the break room of the cafeteria. There was no private voting; you couldn’t go anywhere to vote by yourself. They didn’t check IDs. They just had a list. We don’t know how the votes were counted.”

The way the UAW conducted the vote at Local 600 was highly suspicious. With the defeat of the contract at major factories in Kansas City, Louisville and Chicago, the contract appeared headed for a national rejection. The UAW rescheduled the vote at Local 600 to make it the last local to vote. This meant the UAW knew exactly how many votes it needed at the local in order to claim the deal had been ratified nationally.

Before the vote, UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles held a press conference at the Local 600 union hall in which he warned workers that voting “no” could cost them their jobs. He also browbeat local officials and told them to get onto the shop floor to push for a “yes” vote.

There were large numbers of tier two workers at the Dearborn Truck plant and sentiment appeared strong for a rejection of the contract, which maintained the hated two-tier wage and benefit system and removed the cap on the percentage of tier two workers.

Yet, at the conclusion of voting the UAW announced a massive “yes” vote by members of Local 600, providing just enough votes for the contract to be “approved” by a razor thin majority of 51 percent nationally. Afterwards, Settles declared the deal had been ratified “through a democratic and fair process,” adding cynically that there is “no higher authority than the membership” in the UAW.

After the vote, there were numerous allegations of irregularities, prompting Pedersen to file his challenge.

The young Dearborn Stamping worker said, “It, [the vote] is what the company paid them [UAW] for. I think they are getting something out of it. I don’t think they wanted tier two guys making as much as tier one. But, it should be equal pay for equal work.

“This is the most unequal job I have ever worked at in my life. I have worked at nonunion jobs that were

more equal.

“To this day people are still saying it didn’t pass. If they are giving him [Pedersen] the run-around, that says volumes. If it was an honest vote, the UAW wouldn’t have a problem proving it.”

While the conduct of the vote at the Rouge complex is an egregious example of irregularities, it is not an isolated case. A young tier two worker at the Sterling Axle plant north of Detroit said he entirely sympathized with the challenge to the vote. “I am glad someone is doing something. I have some buddies who work at Rouge and they thought for sure that Dearborn would vote for eliminating the tiers [by voting ‘no’]. Everyone they knew wanted to eliminate the tiers.

“The UAW used the same tactics here that they used at Local 600. People have been talking about it. It wasn’t a tier one or tier two thing, most of the people at our plant voted it down.”

The WSWS encountered widespread distrust of the UAW, including among retirees. Vern, a retiree from the former Ford Ypsilanti plant, said he felt the recent UAW-Ford agreement was a sellout. “When Ford started paying UAW officials in the plant I knew that at some point they would expect something in return.

“The retirees were left out 100 percent on the contract. We got nothing. That alone would make me want to protest.

“I sent a letter to the UAW, but they never published it. They were making all these promises about what they would do for seniors. But it turns out we were just water down the drain.

“The two tiers shouldn’t even exist. That was putting a lot of money in Ford’s pocket. We lost a lot and Ford is probably in a better position than ever. Ford had an astronomical year.”

The exposure of the corrupt practices of the UAW deserves the widest support. However, workers should place no confidence in the UAW’s rigged appeals process. The UAW will use all its resources to prevent an accounting of its anti-democratic methods, not shrinking from the use of threats and intimidation.

To wage a fight against the auto companies workers need new, democratic organs of struggle. The Socialist Equality Party and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* advocate the building of factory committees, independent of the UAW and corporate management.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>