

New evidence of UAW vote-rigging in 2015 Ford contract

Part One

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This is the first in a two-part series.

On March 6, the United Auto Workers Public Review Board (PRB) rejected a Ford worker's request for an investigation of fraud and ballot stuffing during the 2015 Ford-UAW contract ratification at UAW Local 600, which includes Ford's Dearborn Truck Plant (DTP) in suburban Detroit, Michigan.

The rejection came after the Ford worker presented evidence supporting what many workers already suspected: that rank-and-file workers were about to decisively defeat the sellout agreement until the UAW conspired on behalf of Ford to push it through.

The UAW reported a final DTP vote total with 1,681 more "yes" votes than "no" votes, barely more than the 1,500 margin that an unnamed source told the *Detroit Free Press* immediately before the vote would be required to secure a ratification of the vote at Ford's facilities across the US. After the Dearborn vote, the UAW claimed the contract had passed by 51.4 percent nationally, or roughly 1,230 votes.

The Ford worker contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* and said the UAW threw out his demand for an investigation even though he meticulously followed the UAW's appeal procedure and presented indisputable evidence that the union had violated its own statutes. The UAW rejected his requests eight times and dragged the proceedings on for over a year-and-a-half.

"The outcome of this contract vote was not legitimate," the worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "This is not the first time such things have happened at Local 600, and it doesn't just affect Ford workers. All GM, FCA and Ford workers have the same issue with the UAW conducting the vote in a manner that is not correct."

Just weeks before the vote by 53,000 Ford workers, their counterparts at Fiat Chrysler (FCA) rejected the UAW's first proposed contract by a two-to-one margin, throwing the UAW and the companies into crisis and providing headwind for opposition among workers at GM and Ford. The four-year agreement pushed through by the UAW had enabled the Detroit automakers to rake in record profits by eliminating the cap on the number of lower-paid second-tier workers, increasing the number of temporary and part-time workers and giving the auto bosses a free hand to eliminate shifts and lay off workers as sales declined. After the deal was "passed" at Ford, CEO Mark Fields boasted to Wall Street investors that the automaker's "all-in" labor costs would rise by less than 1.5 percent annually—below the rate of inflation.

Expecting a strong "no" vote at Ford, the UAW kept voting open at Local 600 for two weeks so that the local would vote last, allowing the UAW to calculate exactly how many votes would be needed to rig the outcome. UAW Vice President Jimmy Settles rose through UAW leadership from Local 600, where he was on staff beginning in 1992. Settles has particularly close connections to the local union bureaucracy and was well-positioned to influence the leadership in orchestrating the vote.

The overwhelming mood of workers was for a "no" vote. By the time Local 600 voted, 52.5 percent of Ford workers had voted "no." Just days before the vote at Local 600, 67 percent of Ford Chicago Assembly workers rejected the deal. Overwhelming rejections had also just taken place at two Ford plants in Louisville and one in Kansas City. In other words, opposition was gaining momentum and the contract was headed for

defeat.

That's when the UAW stepped in.

The pro-company *Detroit Free Press* wrote an article on November 19 titled "Fate of Ford-UAW deal in the hands of Dearborn Workers." The *Free Press* quoted Art Schwartz, an ex-GM labor negotiator, as saying, "They are going to have to vote yes by a pretty strong margin if this is going to pass." Workers at "UAW local 600 would need to overcome a deficit of 1,500 votes, according to an unofficial tally of the vote provided to the Free Press."

Then, UAW Vice President Jimmy Settles gave an extraordinary mid-vote press conference at Local 600 where he threatened that Ford would shut down factories and carry out mass layoffs if the deal were rejected. The UAW physically prevented WSWS reporters from attending the event and seized a cell phone used to video the incident.

While stonewalling the Ford worker's efforts to expose vote-rigging, UAW made several damning admissions. During a March 2016 hearing before the Local 600 General Council, local union president Bernie Ricke said, "some of the plant-wide units had to go around with buckets" to collect the vote. Local 600 M&C (Maintenance & Construction) President Tom Shultz tacitly acknowledged that this policy was suspicious when he said, "I hate sending guys out with buckets; I don't like it; I am not happy about it, but with 8 buildings and 6 different schedules, guys walk around with buckets, this time we had almost 600 votes, we quadrupled the number of votes" in the M&C Unit.

But the UAW's official vote total showed 897 votes cast by the M&C Unit, at least 300 more than the "almost 600" Shultz claimed. This would indicate that 300 "yes" votes were simply added to the total. And if the "almost 600" figure was itself "quadrupled" from 150 before the UAW sent officials to collect votes with buckets, that would indicate that another 450 votes were gathered under suspicious circumstances.

In addition, when the UAW published its results of the vote at DTP, the results showed *exactly* 500 more votes for the national agreement than for the local agreement, even though the members were given both Local and National ballots at the same time. It is highly unusual that workers would vote on the national agreement and abstain on a plant-level agreement,

which covers such critical issues as work rules, health and safety, scheduling and transfer rights.

The UAW's Public Review Board (PRB) decision tellingly admits that "it was later discovered that 500 ballots were not accounted for." These are the discrepancies from just two of DTP's nine units. The review board did not order an audit of the remaining seven units.

The Ford worker also cited testimony from autoworkers who saw large stacks of ballots folded together in bunches—clear evidence of potential ballot stuffing. Election Committee Chairperson Kenneth Grigsby admitted this key fact in testimony. The review board decision noted, "Grigsby addressed the fact that many of the ballots appeared bundled together." Citing an internal UAW report compiled by the office of UAW President Dennis Williams, the decision reads: "Grigsby stated that as a result of the massive number of ballots deposited in the ballot boxes, he had to force the ballots down with a yardstick in order to maximize the space in the ballot canister and that caused ballots to clump together."

Does the UAW really expect autoworkers to believe that ballots were folded perfectly together with a crease down the middle because union officials poked the bins with yardsticks?

In addition, the worker pointed to the fact that the overwhelming "yes" vote at DTP was out-of-line with the votes at other large plants, which with the exception of Michigan Assembly—which the company threatened to close on the eve of contract talks—either voted the deal down overwhelmingly or passed it by the narrowest of margins. It is also unexplainable why DTP workers rejected the local agreement by a 2-to-1 margin but supposedly passed the national contract by the same margin.

To be continued

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