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Union Votes Go Against Cuts at Ford

By NICK BUNKLEY

DETROIT — Many workers at the [Ford Motor Company](#) are signaling that they are unwilling to help the automaker cut its labor costs further, by voting against what would be the third round of concessions in the last two years.

Members of at least five local chapters of the [United Automobile Workers](#) union have turned down the proposed changes, which include a six-year wage freeze for newly hired workers, some job-classification changes and a provision that bars the union from striking over demands for better pay and benefits through 2015.

[Ford](#), the only one of the three Detroit automakers to avoid bankruptcy this year, says it needs the modifications to remain competitive with [General Motors](#) and [Chrysler](#), whose workers agreed to similar deals in the spring. Compared to its crosstown rivals, Ford has been surging.

Only about a third of the locals representing Ford's 41,000 union workers had finished voting by Tuesday, but already the potential for successful ratification was diminishing unless U.A.W. leaders could quickly contain growing opposition among rank-and-file members.

At Ford's largest assembly plant, where nearly 4,000 workers build pickup trucks and small sport utility vehicles near Kansas City, Mo., 92 percent voted against the deal, according to results posted on the Local 249 Web site. Workers at five plants in Michigan also have voted it down.

"This would be a tremendous blow to Ford and the U.A.W., which has gone out on a limb here," said Gary N. Chaison, a professor of labor relations at Clark University in Worcester, Mass.

"The workers are essentially saying enough is enough, that they don't see enough of a case for further

concessions,” Mr. Chaison said. “Ford had been making a case that it was doing better than General Motors and Chrysler, and as a result they have painted themselves into a corner, claiming that they were turning around but at the same time trying to claim that they needed major concessions to turn around.”

Ford reported a \$2.3 billion profit in the second quarter, largely because of a debt restructuring effort. An analyst said recently that the company could report another profit next week, though most observers on Wall Street are expecting a modest loss for Ford in the third quarter.

The company received more positive news Tuesday from Consumer Reports, which said Ford “has secured its position as the only Detroit automaker with world-class reliability.” The magazine rated about 90 percent of Ford, Mercury and Lincoln models as having average or better reliability in its 2009 study.

The U.A.W.’s president, [Ron Gettelfinger](#), has been urging workers to approve changing their contract, arguing that Ford is still heavily in debt and that workers could end up worse off if they do not agree to the deal. If ratified, the deal gives all hourly workers a \$1,000 bonus in March and assigns new products to some plants, in some cases adding jobs.

“This is a great agreement, and it protects our membership,” Mr. Gettelfinger said Tuesday on Detroit’s WJR-AM, a radio station. “In my heart, I know that for the men and women who work at Ford and their families that this was the right thing to bring before them at this point in time.”

Mr. Gettelfinger said opponents of the deal were misleading workers about the effect of the no-strike clause, which in G.M. and Chrysler’s case was mandated by the federal government as part of its loan package to those companies, and turning it into a “flashpoint issue.” He emphasized that the U.A.W. retained its ability to strike if Ford were to propose more cuts or over issues unrelated to pay and benefits.

Rejection of the deal by the union’s membership would be an embarrassment for Mr. Gettelfinger, who is in his final term as president, and for his possible successor, Bob King, who heads the union’s Ford department .

