

“We are sick of being lied to by the union”

Detroit autoworkers speak out against UAW-Chrysler contract

Our reporting team
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and reporters for the World Socialist Web Site spoke to workers at the Jefferson North assembly plant in Detroit, Michigan, on Sunday, and distributed a statement opposing the UAW-Chrysler contract. (See “Vote ‘no’ on UAW sellout at Chrysler! Elect rank-and-file committees for contract fight!”)

Workers at the plant voted to reject the contract. (See “More Chrysler locals reject UAW contract betrayal”)

Eddie, with 15 years at Chrysler, said, “Cerberus owner Steve Feinburg is a billionaire. He just takes money out of one pocket to buy a company in order to put a lot more in another.” Cerberus Capital is the private equity firm that owns Chrysler.

“A privately-owned company like Cerberus doesn’t say how much their CEOs are making. But Jim Press, the Toyota executive who is now the president of Chrysler, was promised \$50 million. [Robert] Nardelli, the new CEO, got \$210 million when he left Home Depot. Do you think he came to Chrysler for anything less?”

“Now with the VEBA the UAW is going into business too,” John said, referring to the multi-billion dollar retiree pension fund (Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association) that will be transferred to the control of the union bureaucracy.

John, a worker who said he had spent ten years in the “concentration camp” at Chrysler, said, “This contract is garbage. It’s a suicide pact. It lowers pay and continues to let the company outsource work. I’m not losing too much because I’m going to retire soon, but what about the next generation?”

“The company and the union—they are both mafias,” John said. “The union must have gotten payoffs to

support the takeover by Cerberus. The union officials look at corporate executives and say, ‘Why can’t I make a lot of money like them? Why should I live on \$50,000 a year in my retirement when I could get a million or two?’”

Craig, with 13 years at Chrysler, said, “The UAW is trying to be a big powerbroker on Wall Street at our expense. They must think that we are illiterate and unable to read what the contract says. They are going to combine skilled trades positions and, after the contract, the union and the company are going to decide what are core jobs and which ones are non-core, paying half as much.

“This is the wrong direction. It’s selling out the future workers. Ten years down the line, when the lower paid workers are the majority, they will cut out our benefits, and I really couldn’t blame them.

“Everything in the contract is negative. Why are we relieving management of their obligation to cover our retiree health care? And we are the one’s that are basically funding the VEBA, not the company. Money is coming from our wages and our pension fund.

“This is the worst contract since I’ve been here. We are sick of being lied to by the union. We are sick of being told after contracts that there was this and that side letter signed that was hidden from the membership.

“Union positions are all appointments. There are little cliques that follows whatever they are told because they are looking for jobs in the International. [UAW Vice President General] Holiefield sent out a letter to all local officials asking them to support the contract. He asked them to sign it and return it to the union headquarters, basically saying you better do this if you ever want a job in the International. The wage cuts, job

losses and other things we have to accept will never affect the heads of the union.”

Charles, a worker with nearly 10 years at Chrysler, said, “I am against this contract. I think it is especially bad for the lower seniority workers. Personally, I am concerned not just for myself, but for the kids of my kids.

“I’m a third-generation Chrysler worker. My father worked for Chrysler, so did my grandfather, uncles and cousins. In fact I left a skilled trades job to come to Chrysler to work.

“If this contract passes they will set a pattern, and it is not a good one. What really upsets me is the two-tiered wage system. The way it is now, the better classification of jobs are available depending on seniority. You build up seniority to get those jobs. It is not that workers do not want to work hard, but the older you get and the more seniority, you should be able to get those jobs. Now they are going to be paying half the wages. I just don’t think it is fair.”

Mark Fiedler, with 9 years, said, “I think the company did what was best for the company, but the union did not do what was best for us.

“I am against the two-tiered system. At first it didn’t bother me as long as I was able to keep my pay. But I looked at it again, and I don’t like it. I may be making more today but they will cut us later.

“A lot of people don’t trust the company or the union. Most feel the union has sold us out. I think they already had a deal done and called the six-hour strike to make it look like they were doing something.

“I am totally against the VEBA. The way the union does things it probably will not be around in 10 years. Then we will have nothing left.”

Another worker, Joe, said, “Workers were told that the second shift will be closing for a while. Now, the union said, if we don’t approve this contract the second shift would be eliminated. But they are going to do it anyway.

“Depending on the volume of work, they will work one shift to death rather than bringing back the other shift. They will make us work 10 hours a day to get their production.”

Juli, an assembly line worker for 11 years, denounced

UAW Vice President Holiefield, saying that he “is a master of saying nothing. At the information meeting, he did not really answer the questions we asked him. He is a professional BS’er. We wanted them to tell us the bad parts of the contract, but all he would talk about is the signing bonus, addressing the younger workers who have never had to worry yet about losing a job.

“We did not even know that our plant was going to lose one shift until Holiefield let it slip by accident. He tried to sugar coat it, but you could tell that he was unhappy with himself that he had said anything.

About the VEBA, Juli said, “It scares me to think that the union is going to be in charge of the retiree health benefits. There is a huge amount of money waiting for them. I am going to vote ‘no,’” she said. “This contract isn’t good enough.”



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