

“The UAW knew what was coming, but they got a good deal out of it for themselves.”

Chrysler workers react to job cuts, denounce union betrayal

A WSWS reporting team

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Chrysler's announcement that it would cut thousands of jobs has sparked outrage among auto workers. The announcement came within days of the narrow ratification of a new contract with the United Auto Workers union.

On November 1, Chrysler announced it would eliminate 12,000 hourly and salaried jobs in the United States and Canada and cut out shifts at five plants. These layoffs come on top of 13,000 previously announced job cuts by the third largest US automaker, which was purchased earlier this year by private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management.

The Chrysler job cuts followed the announcement of thousands of permanent layoffs by General Motors, shortly after the UAW pushed through a similar concessions contract at that company.

The Chrysler contract, ratified by a bare majority of workers amidst widespread opposition, imposed huge concessions, including the elimination of employer paid pensions and retiree health benefits. New hires in so-called non-core jobs will be brought in at about half the wages of senior workers, giving management an incentive to drive out older workers.

By embracing Cerberus, a notorious corporate asset stripper, the UAW signaled its support for the downsizing and breakup of Chrysler. This fact is further underscored by the lack of even a perfunctory criticism of the layoffs on the part of the UAW leadership.

In order to push through the Chrysler sellout, UAW officials brought enormous pressure to bear on workers, especially in the Detroit area. On the one hand, workers were falsely assured that the UAW had won “unprecedented” job guarantees. On the other hand, they warned of dire consequences if workers rejected the pact.

There is no question that the UAW was aware of the plans of Chrysler Chief Executive Robert Nardelli to slash jobs. However, the UAW pulled out all stops to obtain ratification

of the contract because it puts control of a multi-billion dollar Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association (VEBA) in the hands of the union apparatus. Control of this trust fund promises a huge income stream for top union officials, at the direct expense of retirees, who will be forced to endure huge cuts in order to keep the fund solvent.

Chrysler's announcement of layoffs less than a week after ratification of the contact produced an angry reaction from workers at auto plants across the Midwest. The job cuts underscored the brazen lying of the UAW about job security and fueled the well-founded suspicion that the contract represented little more than a conspiracy by the UAW and Chrysler against autoworkers. Many workers also questioned the veracity of the UAW vote count, suspecting fraud of some kind.

The WSWS spoke to workers at a number of Chrysler plants.

Chrysler named Jefferson Assembly in Detroit as a facility set to lose a shift. A worker at Jefferson Assembly said, “There is a lot of discontent on the floor. The international union was well aware that this was coming, but they chose to manipulate the information to get this contract ratified. They told the rank and file at Sterling Heights Assembly that they would have product up to 2016. They decided to omit the part about losing a shift.

The worker also pointed to irregularities in the voting process. “Tradesmen from Warren Truck Assembly said that they indeed voted against this contract. But when the vote was tallied, there was only one vote against this contract. This is not only improbable, it is impossible! So with a valid vote, this local would have shot this down for skilled trades. This should be investigated by an impartial third party.”

Another Jefferson worker said, “It's disturbing, people just don't seem to be grasping the severity of our situation. I have to worry about whether I'll be keeping my job, and the

people who'll be left at the plant will be worked to death since Jefferson's going down to one shift. That's *supposed* to happen in early '08, but rumors abound about cutting people before Christmas."

He added, "I don't believe for a minute that the contract was (honestly) ratified."

Chris, a worker from the Chrysler Indiana Transmission plant told the WSWS, "Resentment and a sense of betrayal were the feelings of those that were outspoken on their opposition to this contract—resentment towards our International as well as those that voted for the contract. What did we expect? All in the name of competition and profit. It sickens us, the outspoken ones, that so many are willing to sacrifice themselves and their gullible belief that the International UAW gives a damn!"

A WSWS reporting team went to the Warren Truck Assembly plant just north of Detroit. They handed out copies of the statement published by the WSWS. (See "Bitter outcome of UAW contract betrayal: Chrysler to cut 12,000 more jobs")

The announcement of the job cuts left many workers at a loss for expressing their anger. One worker expressed a common sentiment: "The UAW knew what was coming, but they got a good deal out of it for themselves."

Bryan, with 11 years at Warren Truck, said, "They [UAW leaders] are not looking out for us. If they were they'd see these job cuts announced and they'd turn the union around and send us back out on strike. This is going to have a bad effect on the whole region. People are going to lose their houses, crime is going to go up, homelessness is going to go up. It's not just about 12,000 jobs. This goes through the entire economy like a ripple. More job losses are going to follow—it never ends."

Danniel, a Warren Truck worker with eight years, said she voted no. She, like many workers who spoke to the WSWS, expressed skepticism in the vote result for the plant released by the UAW, which reported a vote margin of some 80 percent. "I have a friend on second shift. He called me a five minutes after 5 PM and said it had passed. How could they count the votes so quickly?" she asked.

Patrick, a worker with nine years at Warren Truck who spoke to the WSWS, also questioned the vote result. "I don't see how it passed by 80 percent (at Warren Truck). I think it sacrifices our future. It makes workers earning a reasonable wage a cancer that the company is going to want to cut off pretty soon. They are going to be trying to make things pretty hard on us in order to get rid of us."

Another younger work told the WSWS, "What I am scared of is that there is no retirement. Those who retire in the next couple of years may be ok, but those who don't retire for another 8 -14 years will be in trouble."

Bob, a worker with 35 years in the auto plants and 14 years at Warren Truck, told the WSWS, "We knew the cuts were going to happen. What are the workers going to do? The motivation for voting yes on the contract was desperation. A lot of these people are desperate, living from paycheck to paycheck. And people are overstretched. They felt like there was no other choice but the contract."

An employee for parts supplier MAS said of the job cuts, "If they're going down, that means I'm out of a job, too. If it happens in one sector, it happens in the others, in the whole economy. Detroit used to be the auto capital—it's like a big sinkhole. I had a feeling there was a hidden clause in the contract for job cuts, but I didn't think they'd spring it so soon after the vote."

Dan, an eight-year employee at Warren Truck, said he voted for the contract. He indicated he did not like it, but felt nothing could be done, pointing to the deal slashing wages at parts supplier Delphi. "You know, we felt like if we voted against it, the company would shut us down. We were bought by a big financial assets company, and that's what they do. The Delphi cuts really set the trend for a two-tier system, and other companies were following it down. I hope these [job] cuts are the end of them. Everybody's wages will fall. That is eventually what is going to happen."

Another WSWS team distributed statements at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant near Detroit, which is slated to lose a shift. Karen, a worker with over 29 years seniority, said that many workers at the plant were upset about the collaboration of the union with management in pushing through the contact. "We are working and paying for representation, but this is what we get," she said.

"It is all about corporate greed. You read in the business section about how much money the people at the top are getting, but they keep taking away from us." Karen pointed to rising prices and the difficulties faced by younger workers, who are going to be hired in at low wages with the new contract. "How are they going to buy a home, send their kids to college? I see younger people working two or three jobs, without health care or other benefits. My heart goes out to the younger generation," Karen said.



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