

Michigan auto workers denounce Chrysler-UAW concessions

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The United Auto Workers announced on Tuesday the results of its negotiations with Chrysler and the Obama administration. The contract revisions include massive concessions in every area. (See, “Contract betrayal will give UAW majority ownership in Chrysler”)

Details of the contract emerged less than 24 hours before voting is scheduled to begin. Before Tuesday, workers had heard nothing from the UAW, and many workers were outraged at being left in the dark.

Al, a worker at the Warren Truck Assembly plant in Michigan, asked: “How do they expect us to vote on a contract that we haven't heard anything about? This is a decision that is going to change the lives of tens of thousands of auto workers, and we're not even being given a chance to know what's in it. We need at least a week; they want to cut our retirement plans by half and we're getting 12 hours to think about it.”

Greg, a worker at nearby Sterling Heights Assembly, said: “I think this is a scandal. They are trying to scare people into taking buyouts. I think the people who head the UAW don't care anymore. Their pockets are getting full.” He said that he expects the contract to pass regardless, because “everybody is afraid of losing their jobs.”

Dan, another worker at Sterling Heights Assembly, said: “What can we do? They have put us in a hard spot. You can't find a decent-paying job any more. It has been nothing but concessions for the last 30 years.”

“The UAW is a business,” he said. “They don't represent the workers. A lot of people don't like it, but it's hard to get people to take a stand when they know they could lose their jobs by speaking out.”

Jack, another worker at Sterling Heights, said, “I don't like this contract at all. I don't feel [UAW

President] Ron Gettelfinger has the right to negotiate with the company to give up our benefits. I'm telling people not to vote for it. All we have seen are takeaways. This contract cuts the benefits of the retirees and they don't have a vote.”

“I think this whole thing is BS,” he continued. “They base themselves on the fear factor; people are afraid of losing their jobs. But we've been giving up everything we have. First Daimler came in, and then Cerberus; they've been laying people off, cutting benefits. All of it was to make the big guys rich.”

David, a worker with 16 years at the plant, told the WSWS, “We have already given too many concessions. The cuts are too much. The company is always saying we have to make sacrifices. At a certain point you have to draw the line. Executive bonuses have been on the rise for years. I think it is another ploy to squeeze more out of the workers.”

“I don't think the government is willing to completely get rid of the auto industry. With all of the wars taking place around the world, they can't afford to. The US only got out of the Great Depression because of World War II. But they just want us to work cheaply and give concessions, so they hang the threat of bankruptcy over our heads.”

Many workers sharply denounced the UAW. One worker with 36 years experience said, “It's one crook paying off the other crook.” He pointed to the multibillion-dollar retiree health care plan Association (VEBA) controlled by the UAW. “When the UAW started the VEBA they said they had \$89 billion. Now they say they only have \$39 billion. Where is the rest? Once they got the VEBA they closed the door, you could not find out anything.”

Dee, with 23 years at Chrysler said, “I think what they are doing to the retirees is not right. You work all

your life to try to get to a place where you don't have to worry, and what happens? The UAW doesn't care; they are keeping their stuff. They are supposed to be working for us, but they are working against us. They are not like they used to be. In the past they used to fight for us. Now they just work for the company.”

Dee indicated that she would not take a buyout if it were offered. “It's probably going to be hell, but I am too close (to retirement) to quit.”

Dee said that she had supported Obama, but her patience was wearing thin. “The Wall Street bailout was a disappointment. They just handed them money, but the workers are getting nothing.” Another worker at Sterling Heights expressed similar feelings, “We thought Obama was for us. That turned out to be a big wash over,” she said.

Donna, a worker at the Warren truck plant, said: “They didn't cut pay, but they cut everything else. It's all the same, because we are going to end up spending the pay to make up the difference.” She said that many of her coworkers felt that if they don't accept cuts, “it is going to be like GM,” with tens of thousands of layoffs.

“It seems like Obama's campaign promises are taking a back seat to what the companies want; it's just like always,” she said. “He hasn't spoken a word about national health care since he got elected. He said he would help workers, but this hasn't happened. What many people don't understand is that 85 percent of health issues auto workers have are job-related, and after working this type of job, you can't get by without healthcare benefits.”

"I've worked at Chrysler for 15 years, but it is not enough to retire. There is nowhere else to go if we lose our jobs here."

Donna denounced the way the vote was proceeding. She said that workers had been asking for weeks to find out more information on what they would be voting for. “What are we paying dues for?” she asked. “It's just a sham,” she said. “It doesn't feel like this is America anymore. The American dream is dead.”

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed to the workers a statement calling for a “No” vote. (See, “Defend jobs, wages and benefits! Vote “No” on Chrysler-UAW concessions! Oppose job cuts at GM”)



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