

“Workers are facing the same thing all over the world”

## Widespread opposition as voting on UAW-Chrysler deal concludes

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With voting on the new four-year labor agreement concluding today, there is widespread rank-and-file opposition to the deal reached between the United Auto Workers and Chrysler covering around 25,000 hourly workers in the US.

The contract has been voted down at four plants, including factories in Illinois, Ohio and Michigan. While the UAW claims the deal is being ratified by a narrow margin nationally, it has not released the official tally of votes and has removed factory-by-factory totals from Facebook pages it oversees.

Workers at the Jeep factory in Toledo, Ohio voted Monday, and balloting is taking place at the Warren Truck Assembly plant in suburban Detroit today. The results at these major plants will likely determine the outcome.

There is deep hostility to the contract, which expands the two-tier wage system that pays new workers around half the wages of long-term workers. In addition, the agreement will continue a wage freeze, first imposed in 2003, for another four years.

During the 2009 restructuring of Chrysler by the Obama administration, which also gave control of the company to Italian carmaker Fiat, the UAW agreed to binding arbitration and a ban on strikes. It is now using this abandonment of workers' basic rights to insist that workers will only get a worse deal from an arbitrator if they reject the contract.

Workers are also angered by the contract's inclusion of a so-called Alternative Work Schedule, or AWS, which will basically compel them to be “on call” workers. The AWS will permanently eliminate overtime payments for working past eight hours each day and introduces rotating shifts and weekend work for straight time.

The attitude towards the AWS was displayed by the

caustic remarks of workers on the Facebook page run by the UAW International, after officials posted a note saying, “Happy 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday to the 40-hour week,” next to a photo of UAW President Bob King.

One Ohio worker responded: “Now that’s funny, I work 12 hrs a day then a hour each way in the car. And working Saturday for straight time. But thanks for the 40 hr work week. O by the way, I would love to see you guys work this rotating shift.”

A Detroit area Chrysler worker added, “You took that 40-hour week and killed the workforce, guess that’s why you get so much more money and perks than us! I’ll bet Chrysler appreciates your efforts!”

Another worker wrote, “It makes me wonder if you are all trying to taunt us. Why would you post such an article during this time? It’s like you are trying to torture us mentally. I feel like I’m in a 3<sup>rd</sup> world torture camp.”

On Monday, the UAW reported the contract passed by a 58-42 percent margin at the Jefferson North Assembly plant in Detroit. A large number of workers abstained, with only 1,881 of the plant’s 2,700 workers casting ballots.

The UAW told media outlets that the vote was scheduled for Monday, while it was actually completed on Friday. Concerned that the tide of voting was turning against the contract, the *Detroit News* noted, “the UAW has been trying to prevent the release of results from individual factories until the last ballots are cast Tuesday.”

A young worker at the plant told the WSWs the contract passed because many workers were concerned about losing their jobs. “A lot of workers felt it boils down to feeding your family, even if it means giving up things that were fought for. We were told we couldn’t strike either.”

In fact, the 2,100 jobs supposedly “created or saved” will pay tier-two wages, which start at about \$15 an hour. The UAW has boasted that Chrysler is shifting some production from Mexico, China and other low-wage countries back to the US because of the “competitive” wages introduced by the UAW. At the same time Fiat boss Sergio Marchionne is threatening to shut plants in Italy unless workers accept American-style wage cuts and “labor flexibility.”

On Monday, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party campaigned for a rejection of the contract at the Warren truck plant. They distributed the SEP statement calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition to the UAW. Such committees would campaign for a national strike by all auto workers to abolish the two-tier wage system and restore all wage and benefit concessions.

Campaigners used a bullhorn to appeal to the hundreds of workers during the afternoon shift change. Many workers nodded their head in agreement when an SEP member said, “This is not a contract; it is a conspiracy between the auto companies, the UAW and the Obama administration to destroy the living standards of workers. The UAW is not a ‘union’ but a corporation that functions as a cheap labor contractor for the auto companies and the government.”

Pointing to the growing opposition of auto workers around the world—including a one-day strike by Fiat workers last week against the company’s threat to shift production to the US and other countries for cheap labor—he called on workers to reject the contract and build rank-and-file committees to lead an industrial and political struggle to defend the social right to decent paying and secure jobs.

Many workers came to the campaign table to discuss taking up such a fight. One veteran worker said, “This contract doesn’t represent the future; it is taking us to the past. We know that it contains a ‘zipper’ for the UAW International to reopen it any time Marchionne says the company needs more. It’s full of smoke and mirrors.

“We’re supposed to spend the next four years jumping through hoops to get compensated for productivity increases. For 18 years I knew that if I came to work I would be paid my wage. Now you’re supposed to be a circus clown and be paid for performance.

“The Fiat workers in Italy went on strike last week because Marchionne threatened to move production to Poland for cheaper labor. He’s also threatened to move production here because they are getting \$14-an-hour

wages in the US.

“Workers are facing the same thing all over the world. We have to start looking into how we can build a global movement of workers. Look what is happening in Greece. What happened with the financial crash in the US in 2008 has made its way around the world and is coming back here.

“It’s like the government and the corporations don’t want to fix the economy. They want everybody scared of losing their jobs so people will take any wage they can get. It’s as if this was all planned. People have seen their housing values plunge, and nothing is being done about it. The whole economy is still crumbling.”

About the Occupy Wall Street protests, he added, “I support the protests, and I think they are going to get bigger. Now you have the corporate heads of GE and the Speaker of the House saying they support the protests. That is only to fill people with false hopes and get them to support their reelection.

“Obama and Washington, DC are deaf and blind to the needs of Main Street. They are breaking America in half and starving the workforce. As for the UAW, the top leaders like King gave themselves an increase in wages. All they ever say is the Democrats this, the Democrats that. I think its time we look for an alternative.”

Another worker with 13 years said, “I’m voting ‘no’ on this contract. Chrysler is doing better, and we ought to get back what we gave up. I don’t like this two-tier wage system either.” Commenting on the growing protests against Wall Street, he said, “I support that. They say there is no money for things we need, but they found trillions for Wall Street and that stinking oil war.”



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