

SEP presidential candidate Jerry White wins warm response from Chrysler autoworkers

A WSWS reporting team
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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White campaigned Friday at the Detroit-area Chrysler Warren Truck plant, where there is widespread opposition to the multiple-tier wage structure imposed by the Obama administration during the 2009 auto bailout.

“Who benefits from the two-tier wage system?” asked White on a bullhorn as workers took flyers about his campaign. “Obama insisted on it while he orchestrated the bailout, and the union readily agreed. This agreement has only benefited the company and its union spokesmen,” he said.

“The auto companies have made billions, but the workers got their wages cut in half. We ask you to support our campaign and to mobilize the independent strength of workers against these attacks. Obama, like Romney, is a spokesman for the banks and Wall Street. The UAW, which owns a big part of Chrysler, has become a business.”

White also pointed to the fact that workers throughout the world face the same conditions. Young French autoworkers are now being forced to work as temporaries for a subcontractor, similar to the labor-model initiated in the US.

White’s message was enthusiastically received by many of the Warren Truck workers.

When President Barack Obama visited Detroit last month, he claimed that the bailout of the auto companies had “saved” the city. Autoworkers, however, know that the bailout was a gift to the auto executives and stockholders, destroying jobs and cutting wages so dramatically that the companies could make a profit. In 2011, GM made a profit of \$7.6 billion, and Ford \$20 billion. Fiat-Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne said the company’s \$1.71 billion profit last year came primarily from Chrysler.

Chrysler workers expressed their opposition to the conditions in the factory, the overall social conditions they face and the role of the unions.

Enza, a worker with 13 years at the plant, said she was opposed to the two-tiered system that pays new hires \$16 an hour, half the wage of older workers. “The two-tier system not only uses the younger workers for cheap labor; it’s to divide us, and turn us against each other.

“Now Sergio [Marchionne] is telling the Italian Fiat workers they have to take concessions or he’ll close their plants. It’s do as I say or take the highway. It’s the same thing here at Chrysler. Seniority doesn’t mean anything. It used to be if you worked your butt off for years, you could get a job that provided you with some relief. Not anymore. They want to drive you out, especially if you’re higher paid, so they can replace with you with someone making half your wage.

“Even the union doesn’t have our backs. What the UAW gave up in the last contract we’re never going to get back. Our work environment in this plant is unsanitary. There are roaches and rats. We keep losing, but Marchionne is making lots of money.

“[Michigan] Governor Snyder is taking too much money from the schools,” Ezna added. “They are closing schools, the classrooms are overcrowded and the teachers are not getting enough to teach. It’s both the Republicans and Democrats—it’s sad that no one speaks for the working class. That’s why I’ll find out more about your campaign.”

Sash said, “The last contract was not good for us. It only benefited the company. I agree with your views on the contract. I tell workers *we are the union*, (not the UAW), and that we have to push back if are going to get back what we lost.”

Lorraine said, “It’s sad that young workers are making lower wages and going without health care. The companies are not concerned about the workers, only about the money. And the government is owned by big money too. We have to get away from the Democrats and Republicans—they’re all the same.”

Lorraine said she had received literature from the Socialist Equality Party before and liked what the party stood for. “I know you and about your campaign,” she told White. “We read your newsletter.”

Tom, a salaried worker who lost his job in the accounting division said there were many surprises in the contract that he was opposed to.

“What really got me about this contract is the fact that you can’t strike. And then they say you will get a signing bonus, however they only gave half the bonus and the other half is based on production standards.

“In the past you could go to the dentist and get x-rays at least once a year,” he added. “I went to the dentist, and they told me now they only do it once every two years.”

Tom said he also is opposed to the two-tiered system because it breaks down any solidarity among workers. “When I retire, these workers will say ‘screw the retirees,’ because of the way they have been treated.”

Karen, who described herself as working “on and off” at Chrysler for 15 years, is now working part-time at the lower pay rate. She and her goddaughter stopped to talk to White. Referring to young people today, Karen said, “Young people are paying \$20,000 a year to go to college, coming out with big debts, and when they graduate they can’t find good jobs.

“I’ve seen plant closings, layoffs, hiring of third shifts, the elimination of third shifts—everything over the last 15 years. The pay is ridiculous. Workers here are making the same as I was making back in 1992.”



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