

# Opposition to sellout contract by Chrysler workers wins support

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The stand taken by Chrysler Dundee Engine Plant workers, who overwhelmingly rejected a local contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers (UAW) last month, is winning broad support among workers.

The agreement that the UAW and the company attempted to push through in August failed to address any of the concerns of employees at the facility, who have been forced to work shifts of up to 12 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition, some 50 percent of the workers at the plant are new hires making nearly half the wages of their more experienced counterparts. This poverty-level, second-tier wage system was imposed by the UAW in 2009 as part of the Obama administration's bailout of General Motors and Chrysler. Yet a third category of contract workers at the facility make as little as \$9 an hour while paying dues to the union.

The vote by the Dundee workers reflects a growing mood of militant opposition in the auto plants to the UAW, which functions as an arm of corporate management inside the factories, imposing labor discipline. Workers are increasingly coming to view the UAW as an enemy, no less implacable and ruthless than corporate management.

WSWS reporting teams recently visited auto factories and neighborhoods in Michigan and Ohio to speak to workers about the lessons of the Dundee workers' struggle. The WSWS found palpable hatred of the conditions being imposed by the UAW in the auto factories.

Larry Russell, a retired Ford worker from Michigan, told the WSWS he sympathized with the stand taken by

the Dundee Engine Plant workers. "The union should get out of being part of the company. They sold out when they started getting ownership of the company. How can they fight for the worker when they are an employer?"

"Almost all of my family were in the factories and were union people. My son works at the Milan parts plant, which was formerly part of Visteon. They sold it off. They were still making the same parts, but paying people less money. He is at the top tier, but there are people from the temporary services making \$11 an hour, and they have to pay back \$2 to the temp service. They keep them for 89 days and then lay them off so they don't get benefits. My son hates it."

A contract worker at the Dundee Engine Plant who wished to remain anonymous said, "We start out at \$10.25 an hour and top out at \$16. We are working 11 hours a day for the most part. It is rough. I don't understand who the UAW is working for. We are under a separate contract but belong to the same union (as the rest of Chrysler workers in the plant)."

The worker added, "Groceries cost. I have 3 kids. I make ends meet, but it is rough sometimes."

On Friday a WSWS reporting team visited the Chrysler Jeep Toledo South Assembly Plant. Workers at the plant will vote September 7 on a new local contract agreement. Many said they had heard about the vote by Dundee Engine Plant workers.

A Jeep worker with 29 years said she understood the stand that the Dundee Engine Plant workers had taken. She said she planned to vote no on the local contract

agreement next week at Jeep. “They (the UAW) gloss over a lot of things; they don’t tell us the full truth. At the time of the national agreement they said when times were better they would ask for some of what we lost back. How much better could we be doing? We are working 10 hours a day, six days a week. We are adding jobs. As autoworkers, we keep giving up, giving up.

“When the next contract time comes along we may not be in a spot to ask for something. We gave up cost of living (increases). We gave up overtime after 8 hours. We have to work 40 hours to get overtime. So you can work four, 10-hour days mandatory, and not get overtime those days.

“With what we gave up, at least with me, I’ve lost \$15,000 a year. We aren’t getting back anything we gave up, even just a little bit. Since I have been here we have continuously gone backwards. And now I am making less than I was making 10 years ago probably.

“I had an argument with my union steward about some things that go on with my job. I asked, ‘When did you quit caring about people?’ That’s how I feel. They don’t care about people.”

Another veteran Jeep worker said, “We heard about Dundee. It didn’t surprise us.” Remarking on the conditions facing Dundee workers, he added, “You think that’s bad. We have people who have been working TPT (Temporary Part Time) for 11 years and pay union dues and get no benefits. They have a rule in there for TPTs, you miss a day and you are gone.”

He said management routinely violates the contract in terms of overtime. “The national contract says you can only work 9 hours a day, 8 hours on weekends. But they have been working 10-hour days. Next week we will work six days a week.”

A WSWs reporting team also spoke to workers at Chrysler’s Warren Truck Assembly Plant. One worker was outraged that workers making \$9 an hour with no benefits had to pay union dues. “Where’s their union?” she said. “How can the union defend us when they sit with Chrysler?” she asked, referring to the UAW’s

large ownership stake in the company.

When asked what she would say to the Dundee workers if she had the chance, she replied, “I’d say I wish I could join you.”

Ken, a Warren Truck worker with 18 years experience, said he supported the opposition to the contract by the Dundee workers. He said he would advise the workers to have no confidence in the UAW. “I know it is going to be hard brothers. Don’t accept the line that you should be thankful you have a job. All Solidarity House (the UAW headquarters) is doing is marking time until they retire. The UAW is a public relations department for Chrysler.”

He explained that workers at Warren Truck were facing many of the same conditions as the Dundee workers.

“A couple of weeks ago, when it was really hot, there was a sit down strike in the plant paint shop. We are working 10 hours a day, six days a week. When you are working those kinds of hours in that kind of heat, it is hard. The only place in the factory that has air conditioning is the office.

“Chrysler is making money hand over fist. In the contract it doesn’t say the concessions were permanent. But they are going to rape us and do what they like—take us back to before 1958.

“How is the UAW going to bargain against a company that it owns 40 to 50 percent of? There is no way you are going to tell me that if you own 50 percent of a company you are going to fight for the workers.”



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