

Fiat-Chrysler workers overwhelmingly support strike action

Marcus Day
17 August 2015

As the September 14 contract expiration for 140,000 US autoworkers approaches, workers in Illinois and Michigan told the *World Socialist Web Site* this week that strike authorization votes at Chrysler's Jefferson North and Belvidere Assembly passed by 98 and 97 percent respectively.

The results reflect a determination by autoworkers to call a halt to the decades of attacks on wages, benefits and working conditions that have been jointly carried out by the corporations and the unions. The pro-corporate policies of the UAW have brought about a historic decline in workers' living conditions, and—in the four years since the last contract—brought in nearly \$73 billion in profits for auto executives and wealthy shareholders.

The UAW has thus far remained silent on the outcome of the strike authorization votes, in line with its overall strategy of keeping workers in the dark as much as possible on its closed-door maneuvers with the auto companies, while attempting to dampen expectations and conceal workers' enormous desire to fight.

The UAW is no doubt terrified over the growing support for a socialist perspective within the auto plants. Workers from all over the country have signed up for the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter, with many submitting comments angrily denouncing the role of the UAW.

One worker with three decades of seniority wrote in response to a recent article expressing his opposition to accepting a “culture of poverty” demanded by Fiat Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne, who “rakes in at least \$72 million a year,” asking “now who's entitled?”

Sergio Marchionne declared in 2009 to then-UAW President Ronald Gettelfinger that US autoworkers had

to “accept a culture of poverty,” rather than expect a “culture of entitlement.” For his role in carrying out the merger of Fiat and Chrysler and destroying thousands of autoworkers' jobs, Marchionne was rewarded with a pay package of \$72 million in 2014.

Demonstrating the incestuous relationship between the UAW and the financial parasites who run the auto companies, current UAW President Dennis Williams was notoriously photographed hugging Marchionne at the opening of official negotiations last month.

WSWS reporters spoke with workers at Chrysler's Belvidere Assembly in northern Illinois on Saturday, distributing the recent WSWs perspective, “An international strategy for autoworkers.” The plant lies just outside the city of Rockford, which has had a sharp growth in unemployment since the 2008 recession, and employs over 4,100 hourly workers, many of whom are second-tier. They produced over 348,552 vehicles last year, a 7.2 percent increase over 2013 and higher than the output of any of the previous eight years.

Workers universally expressed their desire to do away with the two-tier system, in which new hires make little more than half the wages of older workers. Chrysler has the lowest labor costs of any of the Big Three companies at \$48 an hour—roughly in line with those of the European and Asian auto corporations operating in the US.

One second-tier worker told WSWs reporters, “I think the creation of two tiers or more tiers is bull****. They're also trying to get other distributors into the UAW...that's just more union dues for them. The UAW is out to make money, it's a business.”

A first tier worker noted, “I worked in Chrysler for 20 years, and I came from Saint Louis where the factories are mostly leveled into fields. We haven't seen a wage raise in 10 years and I've lost my spending power. The

second tier is used to divide us.”

One worker who had previously worked for Navistar said, “They’re working us stiff. Everywhere they are giving you no money. Everywhere they don’t expect you to work more than five years.”

Many workers conveyed their fear that the UAW was preparing a sellout and expressed their hostility towards the union. A worker with four years at the plant said: “Dennis Williams with his salary is not connected to us anymore. What you’re saying about the rich and inequality in this country is true.

“I don’t know how long we can work under such conditions,” he added. “We are mistreated and poorly compensated. And, you’re right, that’s also happening everywhere.”

Another worker said, “Marchionne got millions in bonuses and I have to ‘accept a culture of poverty’? The majority of workers here are tier two. The UAW only takes care of the top and they don’t care about us.”

One worker who spoke with WSWs reporters during the day signed up for the Autoworker Newsletter later that evening, commenting: “I’ve read an article from someone that was handing them out here in the parking lot. It’s good to see others actively making the workers aware of what is actually going on in the grand scheme of things.”



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