

Fiat Chrysler, UAW tentative contract: A corporatist conspiracy against US autoworkers

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The tentative agreement announced Tuesday between the United Auto Workers and Fiat Chrysler is the product of a labor-management conspiracy aimed at escalating the attack on autoworkers and the entire working class. What is being prepared is an historic assault on health benefits, wages and working conditions won through generations of bitter struggle.

The very setting of the press conference held Tuesday evening in Detroit—the UAW-Fiat Chrysler Joint Training Center—symbolized the line-up of the union and the company against the workers. Likewise, the fact that it was a joint press conference given by both Fiat Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne and UAW President Dennis Williams.

That the entire process was hostile to the interests of rank-and-file autoworkers was underscored by the decision of the UAW to exclude *World Socialist Web Site* reporters from the press conference.

Williams' disgusting praise for Marchionne and Fiat Chrysler made clear that the stage-managed contract talks are a façade behind which two business entities, both of which derive their income from the exploitation of the workers, seek to work out the terms for their mutual enrichment at the workers' expense.

Williams and Marchionne hugged one another, exchanged compliments and jointly lauded the agreement, while concealing its actual content from the workers.

Williams' statements at the press conference could have come from any company official. He called keeping Fiat Chrysler in a "competitive place" one of the UAW's key goals in the talks, and went on to say, "Our goal is to continue to make cars which gain market share in all the companies we represent and reward our members." He said the UAW "was ultimately in this together with the company."

Marchionne boasted of the "alignment of interests" between the corporation and the UAW. The union, he said, "has pulled off what I believe is a necessary next step in our industry."

While not saying so directly, Marchionne implied that the deal included the establishment of an expanded UAW-controlled health care trust fund, or coop, similar to the Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association, or VEBA, already in place for retirees. The UAW is pressing for a super-VEBA covering active union and salaried workers as well as retirees. Such a deal would allow Fiat Chrysler to offload its health care liabilities and let the union directly slash workers' benefits, in return for the union getting control of a richer multi-billion-dollar investment fund.

Neither Williams nor Marchionne would say if the new contract eliminated the two-tier wage structure, a central demand of autoworkers. Marchionne merely noted that the issue "would go away over time," without indicating how that would happen. In previous statements, the Fiat Chrysler CEO said he anticipated the two-tier system being eliminated as a result of the higher-paid senior workers "dying off."

There are certain rules of thumb workers should observe in mobilizing to prevent yet another contract betrayal. First, they should not believe a word the UAW says about the contract, which now goes to the International Executive Board before going to the membership. It is not even clear that there is a completely worked out agreement. The UAW felt itself under enormous pressure to announce a deal under conditions where workers were set to walk out at a number of factories after the union announced an hour-by-hour extension late Monday night, and anger was mounting over the lack of information from the union.

Virtually every worker contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed outrage at the refusal of the UAW to call a strike and its blackout of information to the rank-and-file. A skilled trades worker at the General Motors Manufacturing plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee said, “It is typical for them to keep us in the dark. It keeps them from being scrutinized by the membership, since the UAW is in bed with the corporation. I think they will probably give us a signing bonus to try to entice us to vote for whatever they decide to give us.”

He added that he was apprehensive about talk of the union setting up a trust fund to cover health care for active workers. “A VEBA would save the auto companies a lot of money,” he said, “but it will give the union access to a lot of money. I think they are crooked, myself.”

A Ford worker at Kansas City Assembly said, “Everybody wants to know what’s going on. What they’re going to offer us is going to be crap. There’s a lot of tension here. I was told just today I’ve been called in for mandatory 12-hour days, seven days a week, and the union made it happen. Also, they sped up the line speed yesterday and we watched them turn it up. It’s blatant. But the company doesn’t fear the union.”

In a twitter post Tuesday afternoon, UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles issued a warning, implicitly directed against the *World Socialist Web Site*, that workers should not believe “rumors.” He said, “Many entities against us are attempting to skew perception. I ask that you be cautious of the sources from which you receive your information and the material you choose to share. It is imperative that we are not misguided by rumors or misinformation. Again, unity is our strength.”

It goes without saying that workers should be cautious about where they get their information. But this applies first and foremost to Settles and the UAW leadership. Everything that the UAW puts out is misinformation designed to confuse and disorient workers, while the union prepares to impose a betrayal.

The lashing out by the UAW against “rumors” is a sign of the weakness and nervousness of the UAW bureaucracy in the face of an angry and restive rank-and-file. The UAW leadership is aware of the hostility and skepticism felt by wide layers of workers toward the union.

What Settles means by “unity” is for workers to shut their eyes to the reality of what is going on and give the UAW a blank check to sell them out once again. It is true that unity is strength, but the unity of autoworkers is

possible only through a rebellion against the UAW, which is united with the corporations and the government against them.

The UAW will stop at nothing to ram through its deal with the company. Workers should recall that four years ago, Fiat Chrysler skilled trades workers voted down the contract, but their vote was overridden by decree of the UAW, which declared the contract ratified.

Workers must insist on their fundamental right to see the full details of the contract, not just the “highlights” selected by the UAW, and to have a chance to study the agreement well in advance of ratification meetings. They must mobilize against the attempt of the UAW to force a sellout down their throats, and launch a genuine struggle for the elimination of the two-tier wage and in defense of health care, jobs and working conditions. They should form rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by the workers and independent of the auto companies and the UAW, to prosecute this struggle.

These committees must fight for the widest possible support, forging connections with workers in other plants and other industries, including steelworkers, telecommunications workers, teachers and postal workers, who are likewise facing concessions demands.

They should reject the nationalism and chauvinism preached by the UAW and reach out to autoworkers in Mexico, Latin America, Canada, Europe, Asia and Africa to forge a united international fight against the transnational auto companies.

They should advance a new political strategy, rejecting the unions’ alliance with the Democratic Party and fighting for the building of an independent party of the working class in struggle against the profit system.



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