

“They are using smoke and mirrors to fool the people”

Auto workers denounce UAW-Fiat Chrysler deal

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The announcement of a tentative agreement Tuesday between the United Auto Workers and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) at a joint press conference attended by UAW President Dennis Williams and FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne evoked strong reactions from autoworkers.

Workers are angry over being kept in the dark for weeks during negotiations between the UAW and Detroit automakers, followed by the last minute naming of Fiat Chrysler as the target company by the union. The UAW then refused to call a strike, despite an overwhelming strike vote by the membership, and instead extended the contract.

There is widespread opposition to the UAW's proposal for a health care “co-op” for hourly employees modeled on the Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association (VEBA), set up to manage health care for retirees. Such a setup would allow the auto companies to unload their health care costs while providing in effect a payoff to the UAW in the form of a union controlled multi-billion dollar trust fund. The UAW and Fiat are also reportedly planning a permanent reduction in the base pay for autoworkers, under the fraudulent banner of ending the hated two-tier wage system.

Workers expressed concern that there would be attempts on the part of the UAW to ram through a settlement without giving workers a chance to carefully consider the issues.

One Detroit area Fiat Chrysler worker said, “Nobody has told us anything. It would be nice if they communicated something.” On the proposed health care co-op, he added, “I know a lot of people are saying ‘heck no’ on that one. A lot of people are upset.

“I am disappointed. I am afraid they will give the

agreement to us the day of the vote instead of giving us a week to take it home and read it and study it.”

A worker with three years at the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly plant in Detroit said, “The UAW is in bed with the company. They want to keep us in the dark. They are not concerned about the people but only themselves. The union wants to get a bigger VEBA to get more in their pockets.

“They are using smoke and mirrors to fool the people. Most workers are stuck between a rock and a hard place and feel they have no options. But my dad spent his whole life in the auto plants and I know what's right and what's wrong.”

Commenting on the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter she said, “I take a copy every time someone is out there circulating them, and I read it from cover to cover. The UAW doesn't want workers reading it because it exposes what they are doing.”

Campaigners from the Autoworker Newsletter spoke to workers at the Fiat Chrysler plant in Kokomo, Indiana, where 3,000 workers build transmission systems. Workers expressed skepticism that the agreement reached by the UAW with Fiat Chrysler would improve their conditions. One worker told the WSWs , “I don't like the tentative agreement because they're not telling us anything.”

Another added, “I haven't heard much because they're keeping the information from us. The UAW hasn't been saying anything, and I'm voting ‘no’ no matter what. We're gonna flood the union hall to say ‘no’.”

A lower-paid tier-two worker said, “If I have to work years and years to get to the top pay that would be ridiculous. I think they are going to give us a few

bucks. But the first tier has not had a raise in more than 10 years.

“But then they are talking about bringing in a third-tier of even lower paid workers. Nobody is going to go for that.

“People are hurting, so I think they are going to try to throw out a big signing bonus to get the younger workers to go for it. It will be the biggest piece of money they have ever seen. But once it’s gone then what?

“We have to do away with the second-tier. It’s wrong we are making transmissions that make them lots of money, and what do we get?”

A second-tier worker with less than two years said, “I don’t think this contract is going to do anything for us. We are not making enough per hour. I go to school full-time because I don’t intend to stay here. It’s not fair that we do the same work and older workers are paid double.”

A worker with 15 years at Ford Chicago Assembly said workers in her plant were following the Fiat Chrysler tentative contract agreement closely.

“We do not want a VEBA, no way in hell. That is dangerous,” she said. “I hope that it is voted down. The signing bonus is a problem. They are going to try to use that to slide it through. Hopefully it won’t go through at Ford, but you never know.

“It seems to me the UAW has been a business for quite a while. They won’t give you the full contract unless you ask for it. They like keeping people uneducated.”

A second-tier worker with four years at FCA’s Sterling Heights Assembly outside of Detroit said the elimination of the two-tier wage system was his main concern.

“The first tier has not had a raise in 10 years, and the second tier is at a lower level. How can you give someone less when they are doing the same job? The union created this problem.

“Chrysler has 45 percent tier-two workers, and that is the biggest issue. They are counting on the tier-two workers to ratify the contract by offering them more money than they have ever seen.

“Now they say they have an agreement, but we haven’t had a chance to review it. That’s because there may be things in there we don’t want and they are afraid we might vote it down.

“I wonder who the UAW works for? They negotiated for 70 days and still couldn’t reach an agreement by the contract deadline? It seems if we had struck we would have had more power. They should have been preparing for a strike six months ago. They got an overwhelming vote to strike and didn’t use it.

“Marchionne and Dennis Williams are close friends. What kind of a relationship is that? I suppose that is why they did not call a strike.”

Another tier-two worker at the FCA’s Jefferson North Assembly Plant said, “Workers should have the right to study the contract for at least a week so we aren’t being pressured to vote. They are counting on the signing bonus being enough to sweeten the deal so that it gets ratified.

“Workers wanted to strike and were ready to go out. Then at 12:30 AM the UAW came and said they were extending the contract. If we would have struck that would have given us leverage.”

The worker said she was disgusted by the spectacle of Marchionne and Williams appearing together to announce the tentative contract agreement. “I didn’t like it. It shows how the UAW has crossed over the line. Years ago you wouldn’t see the UAW and management in the same environment together.

“It appears Williams and Marchionne are the best of friends. They don’t have autoworkers interests at heart. They are laughing together about how they are going to get over on the workers.”



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