

Anger erupts at UAW meeting in Sterling Heights, Michigan

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The WSWS urges auto and other workers to sign up for the Autoworker Newsletter and leave your comments. Sign up for the Autoworker Newsletter Facebook page here.

Anger boiled over in Detroit on Sunday at a meeting of UAW Local 1700, which covers workers at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant. Norwood Jewell, the UAW vice president in charge of Fiat Chrysler (FCA) and a member of the negotiating committee, attended the meeting as part of efforts by the union to ram through the tentative agreement reached between the UAW and FCA last week.

Workers reported to the WSWS that at the union meeting Jewell and other UAW officials were confronted by hundreds of angry workers. Workers were anxious to ask questions about the deal, which is widely viewed as a sellout that leaves the hated two-tier wage system intact and undermines health care by setting up a union-run co-op in place of full company paid benefits.

Workers accused the UAW of racketeering, and the Sergeant at Arms had to separate workers from union officials.

Jewell attempted to excuse the rotten contract on the grounds that the UAW got what it could get. "There was only so much money on the table," he said. Insisting that the interests of workers had to be subordinate to the profits of the company, he declared, "If you think for a minute that Chrysler is going to continue investing in this country if we blow our wages up so much that they can't compete, the math don't work."

In response to a question as to why a cap on second-tier workers at 25 percent of the total workforce agreed during the 2009 bankruptcy was not being honored, Jewell declared that there was a new contract agreed in

2011 that did not include this language.

When a worker got up and started to read from a copy of the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter, the Sergeant at Arms came up and took the microphone away from him. The meeting continued for several hours, with workers peppering the UAW with angry questions to which UAW officials could give no satisfactory response.

Outside of the meeting hall, UAW officials harassed WSWS supporters who were distributing the Autoworker Newsletter. The UAW officials became increasingly belligerent, shouting at workers and banging on cars if workers tried to take the newsletter. When an SEP supporter asked one union official, "Why don't you want them to read the newsletter?" He replied, "They have the right to the information we decide to give them."

The UAW then called the police, who briefly detained one of the WSWS supporters distributing the Newsletter.

Sterling Heights Assembly workers contacted by the WSWS reacted angrily to the meeting. "They are telling us lies. To keep their positions they have to sell the contract whether it is right or wrong. It has gotten so bad that the leaders of our local don't feel like they have to tell the truth. Their pockets are lined with money just like the politicians.

"I hope the people stand together. The younger generation is ready to fight. When they separated out the two-tiers they opened a can of worms. They are just changing the words in the contract. There are still two-tiers, they are just calling it something else."

"Overall I think the contract is bogus," said another Sterling Heights worker who was at the meeting. "Why should we agree to any more promises from FCA when they can't honor their old ones? I don't like how they

say we can use our vacation on a day-by-day basis, but the company can still force our vacation for summer shut down, which takes two weeks out of my two and a half weeks of vacation.

“We spend more time at work than with our families and break our bodies down so they ache all over for this company. They could at least pay us a wage where we can live without struggling as I am now as a tier-two worker. Overall I think it was a slap in the face to bring this deal to us. They try to sell it with all these incentives, saying we will get more bonuses if we meet a certain matrix, but who is to say we will, or if FCA doesn't find a way to spend or hide the money.”

Another tier-two Sterling Heights Assembly worker told the WSWs, “I truly disagree with what they did,” referring to the harassment of WSWs supporters. “Everyone has freedom of speech. They didn't care about that.”

Speaking about the contract he said, “They wanted to save their face, they didn't want to eliminate the two-tier. We [tier-two workers] are not getting retirement. That also bothers me. They used a lot of unclear language in the contract that could have different meanings.

“Is \$25 an hour the new maximum that you are going to work at? It is the development of three tiers,” he said, noting that some workers will \$22, \$23 and \$24 an hour by the end of the contract, with no guarantee of future increases.

Autoworkers at other factories contacted by the WSWs also reacted angrily to the treatment of WSWs supporters. A worker from the Ford Sterling Heights axle plant said, “That's BS. The UAW is that afraid of the truth. You're informing the working class and disagreeing with their nonsense. The UAW says you can't do that. The UAW was put in place for our protection, but now they're doing everything but that.”



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