

Voting begins as UAW seeks to push through deal with Fiat Chrysler

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Voting has already begun on the agreement between the United Auto Workers and Fiat Chrysler (FCA), a week after the deal was announced. The UAW is seeking to give workers as little time as possible to study and discuss the contract before they have to make a decision on whether or not to support it.

Different UAW locals are having votes on different dates, with some votes held at local union halls and some held at the plant itself. The first local to hold a vote was Local 140, which covers the Warren Truck plant outside of Detroit.

The voting at Warren Truck took place amidst behind-the-scenes plans to move production of the Ram pickup truck out of the plant, to be replaced with the new Jeep Grand Wagoneer. Workers said they had heard that one shift was slated to be shut down as part of these changes, a move that could eliminate more than 1,000 jobs from the plant. They also reported that union officials had threatened that a “no” vote would lead to the loss of their jobs.

Despite the efforts to blackmail workers, there was overwhelming hostility to the deal. At the afternoon informational meeting, a worker with 21 years stood in front of the union hall with a sign that read, “Hell No, We Deserve Better.” On the back side it said, “Bad Deal—Treat it like Drugs, Just Say NO.”

“They said they wanted to get rid of the two-tier system and now we have three tiers,” said Ed, a Warren Truck worker with 22 years seniority. “They are moving products out of the plant to Mexico and the factory is going to lose a whole shift. Some workers are going to be moved over to the Sterling Heights

Assembly Plant but who knows what is going to happen to seniority and other rights.

“The second tier is not being brought up to the first. As for the first-tier workers we are only getting pennies on the dollars after no raises for 10 years. The UAW said in the last contract that they would put the 25 percent cap back on the number of second-tier workers. But there is nothing in the contract about any caps. That’s why Fiat Chrysler’s workforce is 47 percent second-tier. When they get rid of us it will all be low-paid workers.”

Highlighting both the extremely rushed character of the vote and the potential for vote fraud on the part of the UAW, workers at Warren Truck who voted in the morning on Tuesday were told that they had to vote again due to an error in the wording on the ballot. The initial ballot (see picture) required workers to vote “yes” or “no” on both the national and local contract with one vote, whereas union bylaws allow workers to vote on these agreements separately.

Other locals will be voting later this week or early next week, with Williams declaring that he plans for all voting to be completed by September 28.

A worker at the Toledo North Assembly Plant, which produces the Jeep Wrangler, said their vote had been moved to next Tuesday, with voting to be held in the plant. He noted that the plant’s 1,100 temporary workers—who pay union dues but have virtually no rights—will not be working that day. Since many of these workers live in Detroit and not Toledo, the change in the voting day would lead to a significant reduction in turnout.

The UAW-FCA deal was announced at a joint press conference between FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne and UAW President Dennis Williams last Tuesday. This was followed by the release on Friday of self-serving

“highlights” by the union aimed at presenting the agreement in the best possible light.

Facing an eruption of anger and opposition from workers, and the demand raised by the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter that workers have the right to study what they are signing up for before a vote, the UAW released the full agreement on the union’s website over the weekend. The document, split into three parts, is over 1,000 pages long, making it impossible for workers to read, let alone understand, what it contains. Many workers were not aware that either the contract or the highlights had been released.

The main elements of the deal between the UAW and FCA include: the preservation of the two-tier wage system, with new hires taking seven years to reach a top wage rate of \$25.35 per hour, significantly less than the current tier-one rate; wage increases for tier-one workers of 3 percent in years one and three of a four-year contract, less than the rate of inflation for workers who have suffered more than a decade without a wage increase; a framework for handing over health care to a UAW-run “co-op,” which would prepare the way for sharp attacks on benefits; and a UAW agreement to support FCA’s corporate restructuring plans, including the shifting of car production to Mexico and a possible merger with GM or some other company, which would lead to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs.

Various incentives and profit sharing schemes are included to drive plant speedups, with the aim of both increasing productivity and driving out older, tier-one workers, who Marchionne has called a “dying class.”

New details of the contract continue to emerge as the voting gets underway. One provision would establish a third tier at FCA’s Mopar parts and distribution centers. Pay for workers at these centers would be capped at \$22 or \$22.35 per hour, less than the \$25.35 cap for tier-two workers at other plants. For tier-two workers as a whole, the contract does not contain a guarantee that those not reaching the maximum by the end of the contract will receive future raises, creating the conditions for a multi-tier workforce.

Many workers at Warren Truck spoke to WSWS reporters who were distributing copies of the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter, which called for the rejection and for workers to build rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW. The rejection of the sellout deal, the statement

explains, had to be the beginning of struggle to mobilize the broadest support from workers in the United States and in Mexico, Canada and other countries.

A veteran worker with 18 years at the plant said, “I hate our union. I don’t feel like we are getting much help. I think the two-tier system is BS. All of the new hires were expecting to make it up to tier one. Instead what is actually happening is that it is more like three tiers.”

Another tier-two worker said, “They have divided the plant with this contract. The senior workers have pensions and the tier-two workers don’t have pensions and have inferior health care. It is like tier-two versus tier-one. In addition, there is no cost of living increase.

“It seems like the UAW is in bed with the company. They were so tight lipped we didn’t know what to do when the contract expired. People wanted to walk out.”



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