

Autoworkers in major plants vote overwhelmingly against UAW-Fiat Chrysler deal

Eric London
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As results come in from across the US, autoworkers are overwhelmingly rejecting the proposed agreement between Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) and the United Auto Workers (UAW).

The *Detroit Free Press* and multiple autoworkers reported that 77 percent of workers rejected the contract at Local 685 in Kokomo, Indiana. The local includes more than 7,000 autoworkers. According to other reports, 66 percent of those voting at the Jefferson North Assembly in Detroit also rejected the deal.

The list of plants that have voted “no” keeps growing, and the margin is not even close. Among production workers, the national agreement has been rejected with 80 percent at Trenton Engine in Michigan; 57 percent of the vote at Sterling Heights Stamping outside Detroit; 59 percent at the casting plant in Kokomo, Indiana; 72 percent at Toledo Machining; 65 percent at the main Mopar plant in Centerline, Michigan; and by wide margins at Mopar facilities in Los Angeles, Atlanta and Aurora, Colorado. Though skilled trades workers generally rejected the deal by slightly lower margins, the national agreement has been rejected at every plant except one small local of better-paid salaried employees in Indiana.

The resounding “no” vote is an expression of widespread hostility to the efforts by the UAW to ram through yet another sellout deal. The union held the votes as soon as possible after a deal was announced less than two weeks ago, giving workers hardly any time to study the 1,200-page contract, which was released last weekend. These maneuvers have only deepened the opposition of autoworkers, which has found expression in the hundreds who have signed up for the WSWs Autoworkers Newsletter in recent days.

Everything in the contract is either a concession to the corporations or a trick aimed at securing the deal’s ratification. The deal preserves the hated two-tier wage system and creates the conditions for multiple tiers, including lower pay for second-tier workers at Mopar and for axle operators. It gives tier-one workers miserly pay increases that do not keep pace with inflation.

Under the proposed deal, the UAW will be given free rein to raise copays, deductibles and premiums under a planned health care “co-op”—details of which are being systematically hidden from autoworkers. Increased health costs will undercut the already paltry wage raises. For the UAW executives, the co-op will create another massive slush fund as payoff for its collaboration in the attack on autoworkers.

In the background to the deal are plans by the UAW and FCA to collaborate in the restructuring of the entire company, including shifting production to Mexico and possibly shutting down shifts or entire plants. FCA is working with the UAW in a planned merger with GM or another auto company.

Importantly, the UAW has broken a promise it made to workers in 2011 that FCA would be allowed to pay only 25 percent of workers a tier-two wage. Calling the deal “the best you can get,” UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell told a meeting of workers in Kokomo yesterday, “I can’t help what they told you” about the 25 percent cap. Currently, nearly half of all FCA workers are second tier.

Workers spoke to the WSWs about the UAW’s efforts to sell the deal at informational meetings held yesterday in Kokomo.

“People are sick of not getting answers,” said one young autoworker. “They skimmed through the hard

questions people wanted answers to and it got pretty heated. Norwood Jones or whatever his name is gave no legit answer to why the UAW ignored the 25 percent cap on tier-two workers from the 2011 agreement.

“Rightfully, some people are angry because we’re not getting answers. People were asking questions, but they treated us like we were stupid, like we don’t understand their explanations of the BS they’re trying to sell. Any hard questions and they shot the person down. They tried to make people look like fools. ‘You just don’t understand it,’ they would say. There was a good amount of people yelling that the contract is garbage, that the UAW didn’t represent us. Saying we want answers. They don’t give us answers.”

Wall Street, the corporate press and the rest of the political establishment fear that autoworkers are beginning to give expression to widespread working class opposition to decades of attacks on workers’ wages and living conditions. The industry web site *inautonews.com* called the “no” votes “troubling” and “worrisome,” while the *Detroit Free Press* asked in a panicked tone, “What the heck is going on? Why are so many workers voting against the deal?”

No doubt, the UAW is asking itself the same question. But to the 150,000 autoworkers who struggle to pay their mortgage, rent and car payments while the car companies make record profits, the answer is simple: the UAW-FCA agreement is a rotten sellout.

A Jefferson North Assembly worker told WSWS campaigners, “I was very encouraged that Local 1264 [Sterling Heights, Michigan] voted against the contract, and I plan to do the same. The company, working with the UAW, is trying to take everything that working people have. At Jefferson they are talking about moving vehicles to other plants as a scare tactic. They are saying this is the best that we can do. As far as I see it, we do not have any other choice but to take a stand. I am not sure how we will take things forward, but I know that this contract will not do.”

A Kokomo worker told the WSWS, “The union basically told us we were lucky to have jobs” at yesterday’s meeting. “The meeting pissed me off. I sat there listening to them try and justify this contract. I left when Norwood Jewell was speaking because I’m sick of hearing BS.”

Another Kokomo worker said, “This is going down in flames.”

It is not just Chrysler workers who support the “no” vote. By beginning to take a stand against yet another concessions contract, Chrysler workers are speaking for workers all over the country and around the world who are yearning for a real fight against decades of attacks on workers’ rights and living standards.

A General Motors parts worker in Colorado told the WSWS, “I agree with those guys at Chrysler and any other people in the country who voted ‘no.’ I commend the people here at Chrysler Mopar just down the street who voted ‘no’ too.”

In the words of the young Kokomo worker: “If this gets passed, we are setting the tone not just for autoworkers but for every worker. It’s all going to be affected by this. We will set the precedent. Like the teachers—we don’t even have many teachers anymore because they’ve dismantled public education, taking away teaching jobs and adding so much more work for each teacher. I can only imagine when I have kids what school is going to be like for them.”

There are still a number of plants that will be voting on the contract over the weekend and early next week, including workers at Toledo Assembly and in Belvidere, Illinois. At this point, however, if the UAW returns a “yes” vote, it can only be the result of vote fraud on the part of the union.

Workers should be under no illusion that the UAW will respond to a “no” vote by negotiating a better contract. The union is in bed with the auto companies and will do whatever it can to force through an agreement that boosts corporate profits while securing the interests of the UAW executives—at the expense of the workers.

To carry forward the struggle, the WSWS urges workers to seize the initiative by building rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition to the UAW, to launch an industrial and political offensive against the auto companies, their allies in the unions and the entire capitalist profit system.



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