

UAW's Norwood Jewell denounces autoworkers at Toledo meeting

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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.

Workers at the Toledo North Assembly Plant in Ohio denounced the four-year contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers with Fiat Chrysler (FCA) during an “informational meeting” on Sunday.

The meeting, which was attended by about 300 workers, was held barely 48 hours before UAW Local 12's scheduled vote on Tuesday. It included no new information about the contract.

UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell presented a rehash of the contract “highlights” assembled by the union before angrily arguing with workers during the question and answer period that followed.

The confrontation occurred as the contract appears headed for rejection, despite the combined efforts of FCA, the UAW and the corporate media. Workers in Perrysburg, Ohio; Kokomo, Indiana; and Sterling Heights and Trenton, Michigan have already voted “no” on the contract. More than 66 percent of workers at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant (UAW Local 7) in Detroit also voted against the contract, according to figures released on Sunday.

The Toledo workers spoke out against the preservation of the two-tier wage system; the establishment of a UAW-run health care “co-op” that prepares the way for sweeping attacks on benefits; the intensified exploitation of temporary workers and corporate restructuring plans backed by the UAW.

“The contract allows them to work the temporary workers however they please,” one worker said. “One day one week, three days the next, five the next, whatever they want. Why would they ever hire us full-time if they already have it in writing that they can

legally abuse the temps?”

“Instead of getting rid of the two tiers, you have four now,” another said.

“The whole UAW needs to go on strike, shut the whole country down, then we'll deal with this properly,” another declared.

Some workers will have to work for at least three years before they receive dental and vision benefits under the new contract, one worker pointed out, provoking howls of outrage from attendees.

In response, Jewell sought to deflect and downplay the issues raised by workers, alternating between pleading that the deal was the best the UAW could get and lambasting workers for their supposed inability to understand the complexities of the contract.

Jewell's demeanor exemplified the barely concealed contempt of the UAW for the workers it claims to represent. He spoke at high volume, frequently yelling or cursing, while alternating between tones of transparently insincere apologetics and self-righteous moralizing. It was clear that Jewell had zero interest in what the auto workers thought about the contract.

“Somehow people are panicking about the [health care] co-op. The money is the money. Your health care costs them \$8 per hour, and they expect that to rise to \$14,” Jewell said.

“The co-op can't change your health care, and you've got the nerve to tell me that we screwed you,” Jewell seethed. “This contract includes better language than you've ever had.”

“Don't be mad at me for something we just helped to negotiate. We had no control over this,” the UAW's lead negotiator declared. “Be mad at this friggin' country. One-third of our membership is still voting for the wrong party,” Jewell said, implying that UAW workers who voted for Republican candidates are to

blame for the situation.

That Jewell can make such comments with a straight face is a testament to his abilities as a liar and frontman for the bureaucracy.

The Democratic Party has controlled the White House and decisive sections of the legislature for years. The Obama administration has, with the collaboration of the UAW, spearheaded the most devastating attack on US autoworkers in US history, beginning with the 2009 restructuring.

In defense of the contract, Jewell touted the extended relocation period that the deal supposedly offers, saying that workers should be grateful for having four additional weeks to relocate to another plant in a different city if the company demands that they do so.

“How pathetic is this?” Jewell rhetorically asked the other committee members before finally storming away from the microphone.

Jewell’s sophistries failed to convince most of the workers in attendance. He was increasingly bombarded with angry questions, his answers met with booing and other signs of opprobrium from the crowd.

“He was throwing jabs by the end of the meeting,” one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

A WSWS campaign team distributed the Autoworker Newsletter outside the meeting. The campaigners encountered widespread anger against the UAW over the terms of the contract.

A second tier worker at Jeep stopped to speak to the WSWS before the meeting.

“I think the contract is garbage. By the time I make the top wage they are talking about, the value will be the same as what I make now,” he said. “As far as I know, everyone is voting ‘no.’”

“The less money the rank-and-file worker makes, the more the top UAW leaders make. They are supposed to be fighting for us, but they don’t seem to care that we are living in near poverty. The UAW leaders are making six figure salaries and the executives are making nine figures for us to only make \$50,000 a year,” he said.



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