Fiat Chrysler workers challenge UAW vote count at Warren Truck

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Fiat Chrysler workers at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit are challenging the claims by United Auto Workers that production workers at that plant narrowly ratified the contract, which has been defeated in a majority of factories and parts depots around the country.

According to results released by the UAW Local 140 this morning, 53 percent of production workers voted "yes" versus 47 percent who voted "no." Skilled workers defeated the deal by an almost two-to-one margin, 64 percent to 36 percent, according to the union's tally.

"We at WTAP are demanding a recount!" said a worker in a text message sent to the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter earlier today. "There have been too many problems! The ballots were made with national and local on one paper with only one yes/no box, and not one for each. They printed up and released totals that were not true for skilled trades so how can we be sure that production's totals are correct?

"We are the only plant that hasn't released a breakdown of how many people voted yes/no. They only released the percentages to show we are in favor! I know a lot of people didn't vote yes as they are claiming! It is ridiculous. We need to stand strong and fight and DEMAND a recount by a 3rd party! There is something going on at Local 140!"

Local union officials ordered a revote claiming there was a mistake on the ballot when workers initially voted September 22. The initial ballot (see picture) required workers to vote "yes" or "no" on both the national and local contracts with one vote, whereas union bylaws allow workers to vote on these agreements separately. At the very least, this convenient mistake gave the unions more time to try to counter the overwhelming opposition to the sellout agreement one way or another.

With the popular Dodge Ram pickup truck being taken out of the factory, it is likely the UAW is using the threat of mass layoffs or even a plant closure to turn up the pressure on workers to accept the pro-company deal. A worker at the neighboring Warren Stamping plant, where workers are voting today, said UAW reps were targeting young, second-tier workers, telling them if the contract is voted down they would only get something worse. "I worked over on that side [at Warren Truck] for years and there is no way they got a 'yes' vote without rigging it," he told the Autoworker Newsletter . A veteran Warren Truck worker expressed disbelief at the vote count saying, "I don't know how in the world it passed. Everyone says they voted against it."

Referring to the dubious two votes, he said, "We went in the morning to cast our votes and the next thing we heard we had to go back. How do we believe our union that these votes are real? How do we know they didn't throw out our 'no' votes?

"We are in the 21st century. You tell me this can't be done online? We are using pencil and paper. Pencil can be erased. It sounds like a way for the union to manipulate the vote.

"There are a lot of tier-two workers at the plant. If I was a tier-two worker I wouldn't give the UAW a dime. They get no pension, no benefit package. I don't know what they need the union for. All the UAW is doing is seeking to preserve their cushy jobs."

He said that many workers were concerned that with the establishment of a union-run healthcare co-op workers would be pressured into staying in the union to protect their health benefits. "I wish I could get out of the union, but they have our benefits so we are in a bind. It sounds like if we opt out of the union we opt

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out of that VEBA."

A second tier worker at the plant with two years added, "Everyone is upset and surprised. We don't think that many voted 'yes.' When they first released the highlights of the contract everyone seemed to be against it.

"There is something going on. First they rushed us to start voting. Then we found they had the national and local contracts on the same ballot. Then they had us come back and vote again.

"I find it strange that they say the contract passed. I don't get it. First they said that skilled trades voted 70 percent 'yes' on the local contract, when actually they voted 70 percent 'no.' They had 'no' and 'yes' mixed up. How do we know they didn't mess up our vote?

"All the other plants released a breakdown of their vote. They are still waiting to release that at Warren Truck. Where is our breakdown?

"The UAW knew that by choosing Chrysler first for negotiations we were going to get the short end of the stick." She then listed the reasons that she opposes the contract. "They should give us everything back we gave up in bankruptcy. In the past we would get a back pay increase from the day the contract expired, but that language isn't in this agreement.

"They didn't honor the last contract by capping the tier-two workers at 25 percent. What makes you think they will honor this one and raise us up after eight years? And then it doesn't even raise us to the maximum.

"Our local is full of it too. They changed the attendance policy in the contract from seven steps to dismissal to six steps. But they are only taking one point off your attendance record. In the past they would restart you at zero."

She spoke about the conditions in the plant. "The plumbing is ridiculous. We smell raw sewage everyday. But they don't care. It's a horrible environment in there."

She said workers had to be prepared to fight the UAW. "We have to get together and prepare for them to give us the exact same contract."

Workers at Toledo Assembly Complex—who angrily confronted UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell on Sunday—are voting today, along with workers at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant and Warren Stamping in suburban Detroit. On Wednesday, workers at Belvidere Assembly in Illinois will vote at the last major plant.

A majority of workers who have already voted have rejected the contract.

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