

# After workers defeat Fiat Chrysler deal, UAW and auto bosses plot counter-attack

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The United Auto Workers has called the Chrysler Council of local union officials and bargainers to Detroit today following the landslide defeat of its efforts to ram a pro-company deal past 40,000 Fiat Chrysler (FCA) workers.

UAW President Dennis Williams, Vice President Norwood Jewell and local presidents from around the country are gathering at the UAW-Chrysler World Class Manufacturing Academy in Warren, Michigan. The top UAW officials, who are in close contact with the auto executives and the Obama administration, are plotting ways to beat back the resistance of autoworkers.

On Wednesday, workers defeated the deal at the Belvidere Assembly Plant in northwest Illinois, one of the last major factories to vote. According to UAW Local 1268, 65 percent of production workers and 70 percent of skilled trades employees voted “no.” Workers also defeated the contract Wednesday at Warren Stamping with 63 percent of production workers and 64 percent of skilled trades rejecting it.

The agreement was decisively defeated at four of the company’s five assembly plants—with workers at Warren Truck challenging the narrow “yes” vote reported by the UAW—and at least six of FCA’s major component factories. The “no” votes reached as high as 87 and 82 percent at the Toledo Jeep Assembly Complex and Trenton Engine Plant, respectively.

This is the first time Chrysler workers have rejected a UAW-backed contract since 1982. In 2011, the UAW violated its own bylaws and pushed through a contract even though skilled trades workers voted it down.

The *Detroit News*, a mouthpiece for the auto bosses, warned in a lead editorial Wednesday that autoworkers “should be careful in demanding too much.” The automakers might be doing better financially because of the “more rational labor contracts that came out of the 2008 industry collapse,” the *News* declared, but they were “still operating in a globally competitive market.”

Praising the UAW, the editorial continues, “Where the rank and file are demanding this contract fix everything at

once, Williams seems to understand that moderate wage increases combined with profit-sharing is the best way to reward workers without placing the company at risk.”

However, the newspaper chastises Williams for doing a “poor job of selling the deal, allowing those who oppose it to out-message him on Facebook and other social media.”

An article on the industry web site *Automotive News* echoed these concerns, saying, “As feared by Solidarity House, the social media tools available to anyone with a keyboard or smartphone are becoming far more destabilizing—and effective—in the ratification drive than they did in the run-up to a tentative agreement.

“Bargaining team members showed the needed discipline, generally ensuring that discarded proposals did not become public. The rank and file, unhappy with the dearth of information, aren’t bound similarly.”

The constant refrain about the dangerous role of “social media” is chiefly a reference to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, which has been at the center of rank-and-file opposition to the UAW.

A tier-two worker with six years at the Belvidere plant told the *WSWS*, “I’ve been reading everything you guys post and reposting it, and trying to share it with everyone I know. I did not go to any of the informational meetings because I would probably have been one of the ones that exploded. Why should I even go there and try to have them sell it to us? Everybody’s voting ‘no,’ but we don’t know where it’s going from there.”

Another tier-two worker with three years at the plant said, “I sat in on one informational meeting for about an hour, and all I heard was the union defending the contract, so I just left. The union is working on behalf of themselves. They’re above the workers. It’s been frustrating. The union’s supposed to be there to help us. They go along with the companies to keep their pockets padded as much as they can.”

The companies are plotting various ways to victimize workers and threaten them into submission. Workers told the *WSWS* that FCA management posted warnings inside the

Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit, which voted down the contract by a two-to-one margin. Headlined “Zero Tolerance for Poor Quality” the leaflet threatened workers with discipline “up to and including discharge,” if they did not meet factory standards.

Workers rightly interpreted this as a provocation to intimidate workers, with one worker saying, “So quality only matters during contract conflicts? Interesting.” Another noted that National Highway Traffic Safety Administration had just reported that FCA under-reported the number of deaths, injuries and legal claims from its vehicles.

The Obama administration is no doubt closely monitoring the situation, concerned that the UAW could lose control and that the eruption of a struggle by autoworkers could be the catalyst for a far wider movement of the working class against the low wage economy, which is at the center of the administration’s so-called economic recovery.

During the White House-backed restructuring of Chrysler and GM in 2009, Obama demanded sweeping concessions from workers, including a lifting of the limits on the number of low-paid tier-two workers. While the Treasury Department ordered that the 25 percent cap be restored when the 2011 contract expired, the White House has given the UAW and FCA the green light to ignore this mandate.

At the same time, the administration is working with the UAW and the auto companies to slash the so-called “Cadillac” health care benefits of autoworkers through the establishment of a union-run health care “co-op” modeled off of the Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association (VEBA) for retirees set up in 2007.

The rebellion by FCA workers blindsided the UAW apparatus, the political establishment and the corporate-controlled media, which thought it could rely on its labor police force to prevent resistance from workers.

In rejecting the contract, autoworkers are speaking for millions of workers in the United States and around the world who are chaffing against the record levels of social inequality and a return to conditions of industrial slavery not seen in a century or more.

While workers have dealt a powerful blow to the UAW, it would be naïve to believe this will force the union executives to come back with a better deal. Such dangerous illusions are being encouraged by mid-level union officials, including those associated with Labor Notes and the Autoworker Caravan group, which oppose workers breaking with the company-controlled UAW.

The UAW will now step up its efforts to use economic blackmail, including the threat of plant closings and mass layoffs, to push through a pro-company deal. It may also extend the current contract with FCA indefinitely in order to wear down FCA workers while it moves to push through a

sellout deal at GM or Ford.

Facing widespread hostility, the UAW is making noises about possible strikes at Ford’s Kansas City Assembly Plant, a Fiat Chrysler facility such as the Kokomo, Indiana transmission complex, or the soon-to-be-closed Mitsubishi factory in Normal, Illinois. Such isolated strikes have nothing to do with a real mobilization of the working class and would be aimed at reviving the credibility the UAW and reasserting its authority over workers.

“They may need an outlet [strike] to get that anger out,” said Kristin Dziczek from Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan, an industry body with close ties to the UAW.

Autoworkers must oppose such bogus maneuvers and maintain the initiative that has come with the massive “no” vote. The WSWS urges workers in every factory to elect rank-and-file action committees to resist the backstabbing by the UAW and prepare the full mobilization of all autoworkers. These committees should formulate their own demands, including an end to secret negotiations and the full disclosure of the talks, the abolition of the two-tier system and an immediate 30 percent wage increase for all workers.

These committees should establish lines of communication between FCA and GM and Ford workers, as well as parts workers, transplant workers, and other sections of the working class to prepare a counter-offensive. To oppose the threats to move production, independent committees can establish the basis for uniting US workers with workers in Mexico, Canada and other countries to conduct a common fight against the global corporations.

In every country, workers are confronting not just this or that employer but an economic and political system that enriches the corporate and financial elite at the expense of working people. That is why a powerful industrial struggle by workers must be combined with a new political strategy aimed at mobilizing the entire working class against the big business parties and the profit system they defend.



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