

“We’ll be ‘in-progression’ workers until we’re 65”

Fiat Chrysler workers in Detroit denounce second UAW sellout

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Detroit area Fiat Chrysler workers reacted with anger over the growing revelations that the new contract being pushed by the United Auto Workers union contains a series of new wage tiers that will facilitate the auto industry’s drive to establish a permanently lower pay scale.

The UAW has accepted the expanded use of temp workers, who will be hired at \$15.78 an hour, and lower maximum wages for Mopar parts workers (\$25) and axle operation workers (\$19.86). In addition it will take second-tier workers, dubbed by the UAW as “in-progression” workers, eight years to reach “traditional wages.” However, for second tier worker with four years seniority or less these promises are meaningless since they can be nullified for “economic reasons” after the expiration of the four-year contract in 2019.

This explodes the lie peddled by the UAW and its high-powered PR firm that the new contract provides a “path towards traditional wages.” In reality, Fiat Chrysler, with the help of the UAW, is on the path towards establishing a workforce of lower-paid, essentially casual laborers.

“It’s garbage,” a FCA Warren Stamping worker with 13 years experience said of the new UAW-backed deal. “It’s the same contract that has been re-worded. They can now bring in temps 365 days out of the year. The plan is to bring us all down to the level of second tier workers and get rid of the first tier.”

A stamping worker with 30 years experience said, “I thought they did something dirty like that. They gave some of the tier two workers a higher wage in exchange for letting the company hire in a bunch more temps. They will do their 89 days and then they’ll have to start all over again at the entry-level wage. And they have to

pay union dues too.”

“They did some tricks,” said a young second-tier stamping plant worker. “They re-worded the contract so some people wouldn’t understand. The UAW is not working for us. You never see a shop steward in the plant and a lot of people don’t even know who the union committeeman is.”

Another second-tier worker said, “What I’m most concerned about is benefits. Our medical is too costly and we don’t get a pension. And eight years is too long to come up to top pay. I read the percentage of temps is going from four percent up to eight percent. That’s crap. They are just going to keep rolling these workers over and over again and never let them become permanent. At the same time the contract is allowing them to cut jobs.”

After Fiat Chrysler workers defeated the UAW’s first attempt to ram through a pro-company contract by a two-to-one margin, the UAW came back with the new deal, hoping it could use a combination of bribes and intimidation to divide and weaken the resistance of workers. The new deal includes a larger signing bonus for older workers and upfront raises for second tier workers with over four years. However, the UAW has not gotten any extra money from FCA and to pay for these sops it has accepted deeper concessions elsewhere.

“Fiat Chrysler had an amount it wanted to pay for UAW labor over the next four years,” Kristin Dziczek, Center for Automotive Research director of the Industry & Labor Group, told the *Detroit News*. “To sweeten the deal, you had to take something out somewhere.”

Another second-tier worker at the stamping plant

explained her experience as a temp worker. “When I was a temp, life was hell. We were ‘Temporary Part-Time’ workers or TPTs but sometimes we worked 40-50 hours a week. I started in 2005 at \$17.77 an hour and after several years I topped out at around \$24. Our wages went up and down because they would roll us over.

“Then the union told us we had to sign a paper to become full-time workers. They took us to the union hall where reps from the local and the International to sell us our wage cut. They said we could keep our higher wages if we stayed TPTs but we wouldn’t have any job security and would lose our jobs. If we wanted the security of a full-time job we would have to take a pay cut down to \$16.60.

“These wages are unsustainable. I know a lot of first tier workers, making \$28.50 an hour, who are taking care of older children and even grandchildren. How would I support my kids or grandkids on a second-tier wage? The rich don’t see what I see when I walk out my door. I don’t live in a gated community.”

She denounced the UAW saying, “they talked about taking us out on strike but it was really about starving us into submission. They’ve taken hundreds of millions from the strike fund, for what? To hire PR firms from New York to sell us this rotten contract.”

Another young Warren stamping worker spoke about the hated Alternative Work Schedule, which remains in the second contract proposal. “I work on the ‘B’ crew and I have a small child who I barely see. I work overnight during the week and Saturday and Sundays. You can’t have a family life.

“We can’t move up. The UAW calls us ‘in-progression’ workers. That riles me up. I was ‘in-progression’ in elementary school. I’m an adult now and I want to be treated that way. Under this contract we’ll be ‘in-progression’ until we’re 65 years old. The UAW thinks we’re stupid.

“I voted for Obama but we’re still in a Depression. It doesn’t matter if you’re making \$15 or \$25 an hour you can’t make ends meet. And it’s not a race question. There are a lot of white people on welfare too. The rich are only rich because they are robbing the poor.”

Another senior worker at the stamping plant said, “Temporary employment will be a permanent feature in the auto industry. What we’re living under is a modern

form of feudalism. Our lords and masters pay us a subsistence living while they take the wealth from our work. It’s capitalism and the investor class is taking everything.”

He praised the role of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* saying, “I read that everyday. We look at in the plant and discuss the facts. The UAW did this outmoded redbaiting against the newsletter because you tell the truth.”

This week the UAW is holding a series of information, better yet misinformation, meetings at local unions around the country and ratification votes are scheduled for October 20 and 21. At one such meeting of Jeep workers in Toledo, Ohio Wednesday, UAW International and Local 12 reps tried to sell the deal to a largely skeptical and angry audience.

They were confronted by a group of second tier workers, including some who have filed a lawsuit against the UAW for forcing them to take a pay cut when they were transitioned from TPTs to full-time, second tier workers. At the time UAW officials said they had to take the new positions and the pay cut or they would lose their jobs.

“We were supposed to go to \$21 an hour, not only \$19 an hour, according to the new agreement,” a Toledo worker told the WSWS. “We’re essentially taking a pay cut. If the UAW will not go by any agreement they have written, what makes anyone believe they are going to go with future promises of traditional wages? One of the union officials said they weren’t even talking to us unless we dropped our lawsuit. In other words, they were punishing workers even if they aren’t part of the lawsuit.”

The worker explained that there are large numbers of TPTs and other low-paid workers at the Toledo plant. “When one TPT worker got up at the meeting to ask a question, they wouldn’t even answer it. The UAW official said, ‘Not another f...king TPT question.’

“That’s the disrespect they have for workers.”



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