

Fiat Chrysler workers vote as UAW and media push second sellout deal

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Voting on a new four-year agreement between the United Auto Workers and Fiat Chrysler began Tuesday in the midst of an intense propaganda campaign by the corporate media and the union to break the resistance of workers to the pro-company deal.

After the overwhelming rejection of the first contract, the UAW hired a public relations firm in order to help repackage the agreement to obtain a ‘Yes’ vote. Both the media and the UAW are presenting the new deal as a vast improvement over the contract that workers previously rejected while implying dire consequences if it fails.

In a typical piece published in the *Detroit News*, columnist Daniel Howes warned that jobs were at stake due to the competitive disadvantage of US carmakers, noting that the average per-vehicle labor cost for the Detroit automakers was \$2,215, compared to \$1,042, for the foreign-owned transplants in the US southern states.

This despite the fact, as he noted, that there have been enormous reductions in US per-vehicle labor costs over the past decade, by one measure falling by nearly 50 percent—from \$4,322 in 2007 to \$2,215 in 2014. Since 1999 the total labor cost for the Detroit automakers has plunged by two thirds due to mass layoffs and wage and benefit cuts, including the dumping of retiree health benefits into a union-controlled trust.

Despite the rhetoric from the UAW about “the membership having the final word,” local union officials are exerting enormous pressure on workers in the plants to approve the deal. “The union is saying ‘sign this contract or you’ll be out of a job by September,’” a Warren Truck worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* Tuesday. The UAW has already approved the destruction of 2,400 jobs at the plant, in what could very well be prelude to the closing of the factory.

In addition, the UAW’s PR firm is desperately trying to answer workers who are exposing the deal on the union’s Facebook page. According to one Toledo Jeep worker,

comments in favor of the deal are invariably being made by employees of the PR firm posing as autoworkers or local union presidents from GM and Ford. “We’ve been combatting them on Facebook. They pretend they are factory workers but they don’t know a thing about our lives.”

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* has taken note that the only critical statements appearing on its Facebook page—and regularly with the foulest language—are coming from UAW international servicing reps or local union officials whose own Facebook pages show them enjoying vacations at the UAW’s Black Lake recreation center and golf course.

The UAW also decided not to send Vice President Norwood Jewell to last week’s informational meetings after he was roundly denounced during his effort to sell the first deal. Instead the UAW is relying on local union officials to push the deal. “Our committeeman gave us a stern talking to for showing disrespect to Jewell,” said the Toledo Jeep worker. “But you have to earn respect.”

Nothing being said by the UAW changes the fact that the new proposal is a rewording of the previous contract, which contains all the anti-worker provisions of the first. It maintains the two-tier system, thus setting the stage for a permanent lowering of the wages and benefits of autoworkers. Second-tier workers are supposed to wait eight years to reach “traditional wages,” but this can be overridden in the next contract.

In addition, the new agreement permits the doubling of the number of temporary workers hired by Fiat Chrysler. One provision of the contract forces higher-seniority workers to take temporary positions if they are laid off.

The UAW scheduled the voting to be held on two consecutive days, Tuesday and Wednesday, so as to prevent the rejection of the contract by workers at one plant from creating a momentum for a “no” vote.

Workers have contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* to

report intimidation and threats by the UAW in order to pressure workers into voting “yes.” In particular pressure is being applied to second-tier workers, who are being told the offer is “the best you can get.”

Despite intense efforts to sell the contract there remains a solid core of opposition. Teams of WSWS supporters spoke to workers Tuesday at Fiat Chrysler plants in the Detroit area as voting began.

A worker at Sterling Heights Assembly said, “I am voting ‘no.’ How can you have a four-year contract covering eight years? A lot of us don’t trust that.”

At the FCA Warren Truck Assembly Plant, many workers stopped to speak to WSWS supporters at shift change. One worker said, “Labor costs used to be \$4,600 per vehicle and they have fallen to half that over the last eight years. The corporations are just plain greedy.”

Another veteran worker said, “There is nothing in the contract for tier-one workers. We’ve been waiting forever for a raise. We should have gotten a big upfront wage increase. Why did the UAW go to Fiat Chrysler first? It’s got the least money.

“Then you have the UAW president hugging the Fiat Chrysler boss. They are supposed to have an adversarial relationship but they don’t. We used to have 100,000 Chrysler workers to fight for good wages. Now there are only 40,000 workers left.”

A second-tier worker added, “This contract is horrible. My wife and I read through it and we said people are going to be angry. The UAW is getting paid off and getting kickbacks. Meanwhile we get nothing.”

Another veteran worker said, “We are not going to be earning anything if the company can hire temporary workers 365 days a year. This contract isn’t for the second-tier workers either. They are never going to see the \$29 the UAW says they will get in eight years. You can’t predict what is going to happen by 2023. They could shut these plants down.”

At the UAW Local 140 union hall, Warren Truck workers stopped to speak to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*. A veteran worker said, “The government gave Chrysler over to a corporate executive who said American workers had to give up their ‘culture of entitlement’ and accept a ‘culture of poverty.’ The company and the union are birds of a feather. I think that workers in the US ought to do what they do in Europe: should come together to strike and shut the country down.

“They want to close this plant down. Then instead of spending a billion opening another one, they’ll reopen it with an all low-wage workforce. That’s why they are

bringing these young workers in here, in order to crush them. For the older workers who haven’t had a raise in 10-12 years, they just want to get rid of us.”

A worker with 21 years experience added, “Marchionne calls the older workers ‘a dying class.’ Yes, they are trying to kill us in there with back, neck and other injuries. The company and the union are both businesses. The UAW has kept us in the dark and that’s been suspect from the beginning. In my view, it has always been about two classes in America: working people and the rich.”

A worker with 18 years said, “We have a record-setting profit six years straight. The company was never in the red. Then you come to the table saying that for all your sacrifice and hard work, we’re going to give you two percent. That’s the best we can do.

“It’s not right. I think this is the time for us as workers, to really come together. Whether it’s two-tiers, new-hires, or just a worker. We’ve been through this struggle more than once.

“No one really wants to strike. No one really wants to be out of work, but if that’s the only card you have to play, sometimes you have to play it to force their hand and to come to terms—at least listen—to what you want.”

Workers continue to turn to the online WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* to break the lies of the UAW and the corporate-controlled media. A Warren Truck worker who subscribed to the newsletter wrote, “I have 17 years and only can take a one week vacation and the other two weeks are whenever the company feels change over should be in June, July or August.

“Also my husband is on my insurance and has multiple chronic illnesses. He has to visit the doctor’s office many times a year and the co-pay is a bit of a problem. Urgent care was free and then out of nowhere it’s \$50.

“Our raise for one tier is ridiculous after not having a raise in multiple years. It would really help to stop those trying to divide us in every area of this business.”

An FCA Transportation worker in Windsor, Ontario who subscribed wrote, “I think the workforce should adamantly strike down this so-called contract and then send the backstabbing UAW down the river.”



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