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GM workers react to contract agreement

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General Motors workers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* reacted with deep suspicion to news of a tentative settlement reached by the United Auto Workers and GM late Sunday night. The four-year deal is reportedly based on the recently ratified sellout agreement with Fiat Chrysler (FCA).

That contract preserves the two-tier wage and benefit system, laying the basis for a permanent lowering of the pay and health and pension benefits of autoworkers as older workers are forced out or retire. It also doubles the number of temporary workers and sets a precedent for eliminating any limit on the number of second-tier workers.

After FCA workers voted down the first agreement, the UAW forced a revote on a reworded version of the same contract, using lies and intimidation to secure ratification. While keeping the exact terms under wraps, the UAW indicated that the settlement with GM contains more money than the FCA agreement, likely in the form of a larger signing bonus and profit sharing to try to ensure ratification.

A worker at the GM Delta Township, Michigan assembly plant with 18 years experience called the strike deadline originally set by the UAW for midnight Sunday "imaginary." He continued, "Mysteriously just before the deadline they said they reached a settlement. I am sure they reached it before they announced the deadline."

He was angered that the UAW was moving toward eliminating the cap on the number of tier-two workers. "It is a shame when the organization that is supposed to be representing you is putting you in more of a bind than the company, with all the double talk and mind

games."

He said he was particularly angry over the treatment of retirees in the FCA contract. "It was a slap in the face. \$1,000 for a car? Give them a cost of living raise. Reimburse them for what they gave up in 2009.

"The UAW knew what they were doing with the FCA contract. They were determined to give the smallest amount they could. I am tired of games. The UAW has stock in GM. They are not going to fight.

"I am curious to see what they are going to offer as a signing bonus. People are struggling. They are hoping people aren't looking at the big picture."

He said there was a militant mood among GM workers. "There is a possibility it could be voted down. A lot of people have stated that the UAW had better not come back with BS like at FCA. We are not having that. Eight years for second-tier workers to reach top pay? No!

"They are making record profits. If you can afford to pay bonuses to executives and plant managers you can afford to pay us. Payroll is only a single digit portion of their total costs."

A Lordstown, Ohio GM worker said, "It's the calm before the storm here. The union officials are saying, 'Stay calm, we don't know what is in the contract.' If it is anything like the FCA contract, it would not even be close here—it would be rejected.

"Everybody knew talk of strike was a stunt. On the UAW Facebook page they were posting new pictures every five minutes before the midnight deadline. They were all made up beforehand including the settlement announcement. You can't whip that up in Photoshop in three minutes.

"Even if they called a strike we all expected a

Hollywood move. Only three plants—Ft. Wayne, Arlington and Wentzville—were selected and sent supposed strike teams. It's supposed to be all for one and one for all.

"I'm a third generation autoworker. I had aunts and uncles who went on wildcat strikes in the 1970s because GM wanted them to speed the line up and make workers put four screws, instead of three, on a Chevy Vega. That shows you how times have changed.

"We voted 98 percent for strike here. The UAW will do anything to avoid such a situation. You don't want to strike, but sometimes it's necessary. I mean, GM made \$3.8 billion in the third quarter. Ford's profits have doubled, but our paychecks haven't. It is going to take eight years for a second tier to come up to top hourly pay without health or pensions.

"I'm surprised about how quiet it is. In this plant there are still workers that have faith in the UAW, but when they see how rotten this contract is that will change."

As far as the union's claims to have won "job security," the Lordstown worker said,

"That means nothing. GM is still free to open and close any plant. Look at Janesville, Wisconsin—they promised them a product and now half of those guys have transferred to my plant after theirs closed. We've got guys from Lake Orion, Tennessee and all over who lost their jobs."

A GM second-tier worker from Michigan said, "I can tell you that most of us tier-two workers are second and third generation autoworkers. We know our history. We cannot stand by another contract that allows tiered pay.

"Sadly, most tier-two workers cannot afford to even purchase the vehicles they are building. GM has had record-breaking profits on the backs of hard working men and women. It is time to spread the wealth. We have sacrificed. Now it is time to reap equal pay."

A major issue at GM is the expanding use of contract workers, essentially a "third tier," who perform largely the same work as regular GM employees, but who earn inferior wages and benefits.

A worker for GM Sub Systems Manufacturing at the Lake Orion, Michigan Assembly Plant said workers at the facility were angered at the news that the company is laying off 500 workers later this year. Workers employed by GM Sub Systems, while not formally employed by GM, work side by side with regular GM

employees. Their starting pay is in the range of \$13 an hour, even less than GM second tier workers.

"There are 237 of us and at least half will be laid off. They say they are 'considering' transferring us to the GM Hamtramck plant, but we can't get any answers. We put the parts together to build cars and we work just as hard as the traditional GM workers. We pay money to the UAW, but they won't answer our questions. What are we paying that money for, just to get fired or laid off? This is like slavery."

A contract worker at the GM Hamtramck plant told the WSWS that top pay in his department was \$16 an hour. "We clean the machines. We are basically a high-tech maintenance crew. You have to know what you are doing. You have to lock in and lock out. If you don't lock out a machine, it is automatic termination.

"GM is making billions, but after taking out for child support I take home roughly \$283 a week."



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