

“The union is letting the company do what it wants”

Fiat Chrysler CEO issues threat to Detroit jeep workers

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Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) CEO Sergio Marchionne issued a not so veiled threat to the jobs of autoworkers at the company's Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit last week, warning that the facility has not been assigned a new product after 2018.

In a meeting at the plant the Fiat Chrysler CEO berated workers over reports of poor quality and attendance issues. Marchionne claimed there were 1,000 vehicles assembled at the plant that were in need of repairs due to quality issues. Jefferson North workers would have to “earn” having a new model built at the facility, he warned.

Fiat Chrysler recently announced it was ending the production of passenger cars in the United States. Along with a planned reorganization of production that leaves the jobs of workers at several plants up in the air.

Later in the week Marchionne visited Sterling Stamping, north of Detroit, at a ceremony to mark the completion of the installation of new presses at the facility. The upgrade is part of Fiat Chrysler plans to reorganize production in North America, including shifting production of the Dodge Ram from Warren Truck to the nearby Sterling Heights Assembly (SHAP). Marchionne pointedly refused to reaffirm earlier statements that the Warren plant would get a new product, the Jeep Wagoneer, to replace the Ram. This opens the possibility that Warren Truck will be closed after the Ram moves out.

Marchionne's threats come amid signs of an overall slowdown in vehicle sales, which had been setting records. Ford and General Motors reported sales declines in July while Fiat Chrysler reported a tiny 0.3 percent gain. The gain was entirely due to sales of its Jeep brand, with other models showing declines. Fiat

Chrysler was recently embroiled in a scandal over the falsification of sales figures. As a result it was forced to restate its sales figures downward over the past five years.

In July, FCA laid off a full shift, some 1,300 workers, at the SHAP plant due to declining passenger car sales. Since that time some of the workers have been sent to other facilities, including Jefferson North. The entire plant will be closed in December when production of the Chrysler 200 passenger car ends. It is not clear what will then happen to those workers. While a new product, the Dodge Ram is scheduled to be built at SHAP at some point next year, that workforce is being transferred from Warren Truck under terms of the United Auto Workers (UAW) agreement which stipulates that workers “follow their product.”

Meanwhile, FCA has said it will end the production of the Jeep Cherokee in Toledo, Ohio and move it to the Belvidere, Illinois Assembly plant.

Marchionne's threats against Jefferson North workers come as the one-year anniversary of the 2015 auto contract battle approaches. It is a further exposure of the bogus claims by the UAW and management that the sellout deal represented a gain for job security. In fact, ruthless cost cutting and downsizing is proceeding unhindered with the full backing of the UAW.

This is demonstrated by the booming profits of the auto companies, with FCA reporting \$352 million in the second quarter, 25 percent more than it earned in the same period last year.

A long time Jefferson worker contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* said, “Our product, the Grand Cherokee, may be moving to another plant. We won't know until 2018.

“They say it’s because the quality is terrible, but I don’t think it is our fault. It is cheap suppliers and engineering. They don’t want to stop the line to fix problems. They blame it all on the workers instead. They just worry about the number of cars produced per day. They don’t worry about quality.

“They also say our attendance is horrible. A lot of people are being fired because of poor attendance. You get seven absences and you are automatically fired.”

A Jefferson worker with 20 years’ experience said, “Lots of people are being fired for attendance or for any little thing. They can easily fire one person and replace them with two people tomorrow. It’s no big deal to them.

“They are trying to get all the work they can for the least amount of money. They are not really looking at quality. The bottom is ‘how many cars can we run for the night?’”

She said the conditions at the plant contributed to low worker morale and a high turnover rate. “It is terrible in there. There is no air ventilation. And they won’t let us even have fans. There are no ice machines or pop machines in our area. We have no clue why they moved them. They should be more considerate towards their workers.

“You have a lot of people who just walk off the job and quit. I have seen people go out to lunch and never come back.

“There are a lot of injuries that are not even reported because people are afraid of being disciplined.”

When asked about the role of the UAW, the worker replied, “What UAW? We don’t have any type of union. I put in a grievance about a job eight months ago and still haven’t gotten any type of response.

“The [2015] contract is crazy. The new people got a little money, but when we retire it will be awful. We won’t have good medical coverage.” About the so-called job security promised by UAW, she said, “They are outsourcing everything. The new people are not going to make it [to permanent status]. We are hearing bits and pieces about our plant moving to Mexico.”

A worker at the Jeep complex in Toledo said, “Everyone is worried about jobs. There is going to be a mass layoff here in March after they stop building the Cherokee. It will probably be for six months while they retool to build the new Jeep Wrangler.

“They are harassing people. People are being fired.

The union is letting the company do what it wants. They are bringing in new temporary part time workers every week.”



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