

Jeep workers demonstrate at Detroit auto show against job cuts

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Several hundred auto workers from the Fiat Chrysler Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio supported by workers from plants around the Detroit area including Warren Truck, Trenton Engine, Mound Road Engine and the Ford Rouge complex, demonstrated outside the International Auto Show in Detroit on Sunday morning to protest the sudden termination of 88 truck drivers. The action was called by United Auto Workers Local 12 to diffuse worker anger over the latest attack on workers engineered by UAW officials and corporate management.

Workers carried signs reading, “Keep the Fleet,” and “No Negotiations? Expect Retaliation,” and “Stop Pink Slips! Keep the Fleet.”

The first sixteen of the 88 truck drivers who man the terminal and will lose their jobs received pink slips last Monday. Their replacements arrived at the Toledo Truck Terminal on Friday. The workers were taken by surprise and their anger resonated throughout the work force at the Toledo Jeep complex.

Anger is at the boiling point due to the combined impact of the sellout contracts imposed in 2015 at all the Detroit-based auto makers and the impact of a corruption scandal involving millions of dollars in joint training funds siphoned off to union officials through Fiat Chrysler management.

In the most recent developments, UAW Vice-President for Chrysler Norwood Jewell was forced to resign in December when it became known that he accepted an expensive shotgun as a “birthday gift” paid for by misappropriated funds. Meanwhile, Fiat Chrysler executive Alphons Iacobelli and Monica Morgan, the wife of the late UAW vice president for Fiat Chrysler negotiator General Holiefield, both pled guilty to receiving illegal payouts.

The calling of the demonstration at the auto show

follows the filing of a lawsuit January 11 in US District Court in Ohio by some 72 former workers in the Jeep Wrangler Paint Shop at the Jeep complex. They allege that company bribes to UAW officials led to a pro-company sweetheart deal that sanctioned their firing in 2012. Holiefield was the international UAW official in charge of negotiations with FCA that resulted in the termination of the workers.

Local 12 officials have cited the company’s refusal to negotiate over the termination of the truck driver and claim they were blindsided by the layoffs. For its part, Fiat Chrysler management says the shutdown of the Toledo terminal had been under discussion with the UAW “for years.” Workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* say they suspect that Holiefield and Jewell had negotiated away the jobs in a backroom deal at a time when the illegal payments were taking place.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to a number of workers at Sunday’s demonstration.

A forklift driver at the Toledo Jeep plant with five years seniority said he is still under the lower pay rate contained in the two-tier wage structure. “The contract that was ratified in 2015 was shit,” he said. “It extended the two-tier system for eight years. We don’t know what’s going to happen in the next contract in 2019. That could change. The third tier they brought in are the temporary part time workers (TPTs).”

Speaking about the corruption scandal, he continued, “A lot of people are wondering now how that factors into our present contract. Does the corruption, which was involved in negotiating the contract, make it null and void? I would like to know. Everyone would like to know. There was obvious corruption at the top with the negotiations.”

“There is a union management safety committee and the working conditions and safety issues in the last contract are crap. Rain comes pouring down through the ceiling, and we have to drive through that with thousands of pounds of freight.”

He focused on the glaring chasm of social inequality which millions confront every day. “Our CEO Sergio Marchionne had a bonus last year of \$80 million,” he continued. “The move right here to cut 90 jobs is done to save the company \$4 million. It is totally out of balance. That makes no sense to me. How do you cash that check?”

“The company and the union have been in bed together far too long,” he said to sum up. “This is what it has gotten us. It has to stop.”

A truck driver who was losing his job had hired in as a second-tier worker making \$14.98, following Obama’s restructuring of the auto industry in 2009 and had just made first tier and full pay. His case exemplifies the financial motivation behind the layoffs. His replacement will be essentially casual labor with no rights making \$14.00 and hour.

“It’s wrong of them to do this to us, especially with Chrysler making billions of dollars in profits,” he said. “The two-tier system creates animosity among people getting paid different amounts for the same work.”

Last July Fiat Chrysler announced it had earned \$1.35 billion in the second quarter, up an obscene 207 percent over the same period a year earlier. And the following quarter announcement carried a similar insult with earnings of \$1.07 billion (910 million euro) for an increase of 50 percent over the same period a year earlier.

His co-worker who is still tier two added, “We are being blindsided by backdoor negotiations. Jewell signed a secret deal that is now being put into effect.”

UAW Local 12 President Bruce Baumhower organized the demonstration in an attempt to distance himself from the corruption scandal that is enveloping the union and threatening the eruption of another rank and file rebellion. 2015 marked the first time in thirty years that Chrysler workers had voted down a national contract. Their combative mood found powerful echoes among workers at both General Motors and Ford.

But, when Baumhower was asked by the WSWS if he would organize strike action to fight the job cuts, he flatly rejected the idea. In fact he only initiative

proposed by Local 12 so far has been to issue t-shirts to plant workers.

The trucker continued, “Bonuses have been withheld from us each year for years, up to \$20,000 worth.” And to underscore the bankruptcy of company-union safety committees, he explained how they routinely violate safety regulations. “Management tells us to log off the clock on the road,” he said, “to get around safety regulations limiting the number of hours we can drive.”

A young Jeep worker with four years said, “They are trying to cut costs and save money. Those jobs were in our contract until 2019. They claim they have an agreement with the UAW, but they won’t show us the contract.”

Another young Jeep worker said, “They say they had a contract with [General] Holifield and [Norwood] Jewell. But they broke a binding contract that was in place. They can’t outsource jobs as long as we have a contract.

“The whole time, Holifield and Jewell were taking money from the company and lining their own pockets.”

Robert, a truck driver at the terminal also spoke with the WSWS,

“Nobody gets to see the contract. We are not sure what is going to happen. It seems we will be sent back into the plant and put on the assembly line. I’ve been a truck driver with the company for 21 years in February. We are not even sure if we are keeping the same rate of pay or taking a cut.

“I have done everything they asked. Many times I have been sitting down at the dinner table on my day off and they have called me on the phone and said I have to go out on a run. And I have gone out.

“Workers in the plant are supporting us. [UAW President] Dennis Williams sold us out. I don’t think anyone from the UAW international is down here.”



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