

“All you have given us is a slap in the face”

Fiat Chrysler autoworkers denounce UAW sellout at informational meetings

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At so-called “informational” meetings held by the United Auto Workers over the weekend, Fiat Chrysler workers expressed anger and frustration at the union’s attempt to ram through another sellout contract. Workers demanded clarification of the terms of the tentative agreement accepted by the UAW, contained in three “white books” spanning over one thousand pages posted on the UAW website.

The tentative contract lays the groundwork for the expanded use of temporary workers (re-termed “supplemental” in the contract). Unlike the Ford and General Motors contracts, the Fiat Chrysler deal does not contain even the pretense of a “pathway” to full-time status for these workers. Their ability to achieve full-time status will be totally at the discretion of management.

The promise of a \$9,000 signing bonus is being used as a bribe to distract from totally inadequate wage increases and language that lays the groundwork for further attacks on health care. While the UAW claimed it won equal health care benefits for “in progression” employees, the contract contains language in which the union promises to assist FCA to reduce health care costs.

The UAW is pushing hard to ram through another betrayal in line with those at GM and Ford before workers have a chance to study the agreement. Voting only began last Friday, but the union will announce the result of the national poll in the middle of this week. Many members were angered by the union’s attempt to pull a fast one on them.

UAW Local 7, which covers hourly employees at FCA’s Jefferson North Assembly Plant, held three informational meetings Saturday. A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team distributed copies of the *Autoworker Newsletter* containing a statement urging a “no” vote to workers leaving the meeting.

Jefferson North workers will vote on the four-year agreement Tuesday, December 10. Many workers said that the hurry-up character of the voting process made it impossible to adequately evaluate the agreement.

“It came out yesterday, and I could only read a few pages,” said a worker who is still “in progression” after almost a decade at Jefferson North. “I haven’t gotten through it all

because I work the alternative work schedule. [ten-hour shifts, or longer on a four-day schedule],” she continued. “I don’t want to talk to anybody about the contract who hasn’t read the whole contract.

“People were asking questions about the minimal information that they put out because everybody hasn’t read the whole contract. You have the white pages and you have the ‘highlights.’”

Another worker leaving the hall told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, “Everybody knows the union is corrupt,” referring to the ongoing federal investigation into UAW corruption that saw the resignation of UAW President Gary Jones. A lawsuit filed by General Motors denounced the collusion between the UAW and Fiat Chrysler in imposing a series of sweetheart contracts as amounting to a criminal racket.

Meanwhile, the current lead negotiator with FCA, UAW Vice president Cindy Estrada, has been linked to a pattern of payoffs at the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources. Michael Grimes, Estrada’s former executive assistant at GM, pleaded guilty for his role in engineering nearly \$2 million in kickbacks.

“My thing is this,” said another Jefferson worker. “Since they have classified them now as ‘supplemental workers’ because they are not temporary workers anymore,” she asked, “does that mean there is no more hiring of full-time employees? What they are basing everything on now is ‘supplemental employment.’”

“They were always determined to get three tiers,” she said. “Now they have them. Eventually, I am sure their goal is to have all workers in tier three.”

Not surprisingly, many workers said they had no confidence in the panel of union officials, which is created in the new agreement, that will decide which temporary/supplemental employees will get rolled over to full-time employment.

“I don’t have any confidence in the union,” a worker said on leaving the meeting. “They are negotiating on the basis of the GM pattern and they kept all of the different pay scales which they were supposed to get rid of: in progression, TPTs, STSs. Everybody knows that FCA bought the union. I am not comfortable about that. A union panel will control who gets

rolled over to full time. And they are corrupt.”

WSWS supporters urged Fiat Chrysler workers to take the initiative in building their own organizations, rank-and-file committees, composed of their most trusted colleagues in every factory, to take the struggle against the corporations out of the hands of the UAW.

“I need a world perspective,” a worker said referring to the *Autoworker Newsletter*. “I read every issue. I do not want to think that...the [American] auto industry and the UAW and Chrysler itself is all there is... I’ve been through a few things. I have seen a lot. I would love to hear from other people, what experiences they’ve had and to hear about different perspectives.”

UAW officials who approached WSWS supporters outside the meeting, expressed their hostility to the *Autoworker Newsletter* as well as their contempt for the democratic right of their members to read it. One official, after identifying himself and admitting that “you are on public property” [the city sidewalk], warned, “It would be good if you leave now.”

Another worker said, “It was confusing. I don’t know about these people. I don’t have any confidence in the UAW. I don’t see any reason to vote for this contract, and I’m not going to vote for it.”

A coworker added: “In the factory, younger workers and older workers are divided against each other on the basis of wages, seniority, temporaries versus legacy.”

A third agreed. “I do not understand why you have separate contracts for General Motors, Ford and FCA. If we were all together, we would be stronger. The same thing is true in the factory. All these different pay scales between legacy, in progression and TPT. They divide us.” He agreed with the need to build rank-and-file committees to unite workers across the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The following Sunday, hundreds of workers at the Fiat Chrysler Toledo Jeep complex attended a contract information meeting downtown.

Workers who attended the meeting said that workers showered UAW officials with questions about the contract. Many expressed anger over the signing bonus, saying it was being used to help force a bad contract down workers’ throats.

A veteran Jeep worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “A lot of workers don’t want to hear the BS. They are just voting ‘no.’”

A video of the meeting posted on the internet shows workers launching a barrage of questions at UAW officials. A worker asks, “What happens to the in progression or laid-off workers, if they get laid off? Do they get to keep their money or do they have to start all over again? I don’t think these are questions anyone understands yet.

“We gave up overtime after 8 hours. We gave up the cost of living. We gave up the Christmas bonus. We gave up a week’s vacation for 5 PA (personal) days. Pensions were destroyed and two-tier systems [put in place].

“Year after year the company has made record profits off our labor... Is this fair to this working bunch of people?”

He continued, “All you have given us is a slap in the face. All they are doing is to keep taking from us.”

When union officials refused to answer his questions and move on, that meeting erupted in angry shouts and catcalls.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls for workers to decisively reject this sellout agreement. But the experience in 2015, when Fiat Chrysler workers rejected a tentative agreement for the first time in decades only to be forced to vote again on virtually the same agreement, proves a “no” vote will not convince the UAW to come back with anything better.

To take their struggle forward, autoworkers must form rank-and-file committees, led by the most trusted workers from the shop floor and excluding union bureaucrats, to take the initiative out of the hands of the bought-and-paid-for union apparatus.

In opposition to the sellout engineered by the UAW, these committees will fight for demands formulated by autoworkers themselves, which should include: the immediate hiring of all temporary workers as full employees; a forty percent across-the-board wage increase to make up for decades of lost wages; fully funded pensions and healthcare; and workers’ control over production, line speed and safety.

This can only be accomplished by mobilizing the power of the international working class, which is facing the same attacks on jobs in every country. These rank-and-file committees must be guided by the principle of internationalism, in opposition to the divisive “America first” nationalism of the UAW.

We urge all those who agree with this perspective to contact us today at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact