

Dundee, Michigan Chrysler workers denounce sellout agreement

By a WSWWS reporting team
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Workers at the Chrysler Dundee Engine plant voiced strong opposition to the sellout local contract agreement, recently rejected by a 73 percent margin, negotiated by the United Auto Workers. The factory, located southwest of Detroit, produces the 1.4 liter engine for the Fiat 500 and the 2.0 and 2.4 liter engines for several Chrysler models. It is also slated to build the engine for the new Dodge Dart scheduled to launch this fall.

The overwhelming vote against the agreement came as a surprise to both the company and union officials. It was the first rejection of a local agreement since Chrysler exited bankruptcy in 2009. The union has scheduled two meetings for Thursday as part of an effort to push through the contract. In the meantime, management has made it clear that it will not reopen negotiations.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team visited the plant on Wednesday, distributing copies of the WSWWS Auto Newsletter and a report from the WSWWS on the rejection vote. Despite attempts by company security to stop the distribution of the material, a number of workers stopped to give their comments to the WSWWS.

Workers reported that they have been working 6 and 7 days a week up to 12 hours a day indefinitely. Workers were angry that the UAW refused to enforce terms of the national agreement that place certain limits on the amount of overtime workers can be forced to work.

Workers also expressed opposition to the two-tier wage structure in effect at the plant. Half the workers at the Dundee Engine Plant are lower tier workers starting at the near poverty wage of \$15.78 an hour.

Greg, a Chrysler employee for 18 years who was transferred to the Dundee Engine Plant just five weeks ago, stopped to explain his opposition to the proposed

contract. “I don’t like forcing the second shift to work on weekends. It’s not equitable. Everyone wants Sundays off. They can’t just put it in on the second shift. Weekend work should be divided fairly.”

Many workers preferred to withhold their names for fear of victimization by the UAW and management. A worker with 7 years at the plant said, “In the contract we got an ice maker and a water fountain. There was nothing in the contract for us. There was no reason to vote for it.”

Another worker said, “I have been hearing scare tactics, that if we don’t vote for this they will close the plant. But I think there should be more fairness about shift preferences and seniority.

“They also have a lot of second tier guys making half of what we are making doing the same job. There is a lot of animosity in the plant over that.”

A worker who started in 2005 said, “They didn’t give us anything to vote on. It didn’t amount to anything. We feel the union didn’t negotiate on our behalf. There is a big conflict of interest with the union owning stock in Chrysler. They are not representing our interests. They are representing their own interests.

“In the new contract they are doing away with all our grievances for \$350.

“Everything is referred back to the national contract. Why do we have a local agreement? We are always on overtime. They want us to be a critical plant across the whole term of the contract, which is going against our national contract.” He explained that if a factory is designated to be on “critical status” by management, contractual restrictions on overtime are lifted. Normally a plant can be placed on critical status for only 90 days.

He explained that under the proposed agreement the company could go back to the system of rotating shifts introduced last year. Workers were placed on 12-hour

shifts that switched from nights to days each week. The schedule created so much animosity in the workforce that the company later discarded it.

“The company and the union are pushing hard that we vote for this. The union is going to preach to us that it is ‘the best we can get.’ But it is going to be worse. We have a human resource manager who is a bully. He walks around very arrogant. It is their way or the highway.” Referring to attempts by management and the UAW to prevent the distribution of the WSWS Auto Newsletter at the factory, he added, “They don’t want us to know the truth about what is happening.”

Another worker told the WSWS, “A lot of people are upset because they have placed us on critical status in production, so you have no choice (about working overtime). There is no time limit, so they can work you as hard as they can.

“People are upset because they say we are a part of the national agreement, but no one has seen the contract. We have only seen bits and pieces of it, so we don’t know what our rights are. According to previous policy they could place us on critical production for 90 days. They would often have us on 90 days on, then 90 days normal. Now it is indefinite. You get a little extra in pay, but you don’t get any days off.

“That means working 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

“On the wages issue, because we signed the national contract we should have received back wages from October 17, 2011 to May 2012. For many workers this was upward to \$10,000. The back pay was actually placed in our accounts and then they found out the contract was voted down and the money was taken out.”

Another worker added, “We’re not being represented. It’s sad when the ones who are supposed to represent us are only doing what’s best for them.

“They’re not telling what’s really going on in there. They’re forcing people to work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. No one has time for themselves or their families.” She added angrily, “It’s ridiculous! No one wants to be in the position where they are forced into working long hours 7 days a week.”

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