

UAW claims early returns point to ratification of Fiat Chrysler sellout contract

By Shannon Jones
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As voting wrapped up Wednesday on the sellout deal between Fiat Chrysler and the United Auto Workers, there is widespread anger and disgust among workers. The new deal is a reworked version of the original contract, overwhelmingly rejected by Fiat Chrysler workers earlier this month.

Early returns released by the UAW reported the contract passing at major plants, including the Warren Truck Assembly plant outside Detroit, where the UAW claimed a 70 percent to 30 percent vote in favor of ratification. The UAW also reported that the contract passed by substantial margins at the Dundee Engine Plant, Sterling Stamping, Trenton Engine, Toledo Jeep, Kokomo Casting and a number of other plants. The UAW indicated it will make an official announcement of the vote results on Thursday.

The vote was held under a cloud of mistrust by auto workers, who have repeatedly voiced their concern to WSWs reporters over the integrity of the process.

As one Warren Truck worker commented on the UAW Facebook page, “I think they will go to ANY lengths this time to get it passed. They have to. They hired a PR firm from NY to assist them for God sakes. Making videos and putting things looking very professional on multiple social media sites. Using multiple platforms. Its insanely obvious that they absolutely must pass it this time. Something really bad is brewing for us guys. Vote NO.”

Every effort was made by the UAW and corporate media to ensure a “yes” vote by employing a combination of lies, economic blackmail and threats. In the days leading up to the vote, workers were subjected to a barrage of propaganda in favor of the deal, which was presented by the union as a major advance.

More significant were the dire warnings of what would happen if workers voted “no.” Workers were

threatened that they would lose their jobs if they voted against the deal. Many who voted “yes” were hostile but had no confidence that the UAW would wage a struggle. The union has made it clear that any strike action would be isolated and aimed at stringing out workers on miserly strike pay.

The contract preserves the two-tier wage and benefit system, according to which workers hired after 2007 receive significantly lower pay and inferior health and pension benefits. The company and the UAW are seeking to drive out higher-paid workers to establish a permanently lower wage and benefit system across the board, along with the expansion in temporary and part-time employees.

Slight changes in the wage structure included in the second deal to win support from some tier-two workers, who are living paycheck to paycheck. These changes, aimed at dividing workers against each other, were balanced by concessions in other areas, including a doubling in the percentage of temporary workers, from four to eight percent.

A WSWs reporting campaign team encountered substantial opposition to the contract at the Toledo Jeep complex. Opposition was especially strong among temporary part time workers, who make up a large percentage of the workforce at the complex that builds the Jeep Cherokee and Jeep Wrangler.

One TPT worker told the WSWs, “I voted ‘no.’ It doesn’t do anything for us. We don’t get vacations, and we don’t get any of the bonuses, we don’t get prescription coverage.

“The new contract will allow them to call us in whenever they want. It is like we will be working full time, but with part time pay.”

One Jeep worker said, “I don’t believe the UAW will let this go to a third vote.” Her colleague nodded his

head in agreement.

One worker said that his grandfather and father were both auto workers and he hadn't anticipated it would be harder for him than for them. "On top of that I have \$40,000 in student debt."

Another second-tier worker said, "It is outrageous that a corporation making billions of dollars says it can't afford to pay us decently so that we can raise a family. It is about fighting for what we deserve. If I say that I am going to devote 30 years of my life to this job I feel they should pay us enough to support our families, send our kids to school and be able to retire. You can only oppress people so long before it falls back on you."

Replying to the argument that the small pay raises contained in the contract represented an advance, he said, "It is not just about tomorrow, it is about the rest of your life. What are they going to do in the next contract? If health care goes up double in this contract, what is it going to be when I retire?"

"I cannot even afford a Chrysler vehicle and pay my bills at the same time. I moved into a rougher neighborhood so I could afford to pay for things I needed.

"I went to the hospital one time last year and I owe \$17,000 after what the insurance paid. I would have to work every hour of the day to keep up with my bills.

"It shouldn't be like that. This is a career job, not a burger place. I decided this is where I wanted to be. In the past, if you worked in an auto plant it meant you would have a retirement, a nice car and a nice home. That's what it meant to be an auto worker when I was a kid."

The sole concern of the UAW throughout the whole process has been to defend the profit interests of FCA, wear down opposition and force through a contract. In return it is hoping to develop its business operations through the expansion of its health care fund, including through the possible creation of a union-run "co-op" to slash health care costs for the company.

Whatever the outcome of the vote, the experience has dealt a severe blow to the credibility of the UAW, which is seen by broad layers of workers as the tool of corporate management. Any pretense that this organization has anything to do with defending workers interests has been unmasked by the blatant way it has attempted to impose a contract dictated by management

under conditions where Fiat Chrysler and the other Detroit auto makers are making record profits.

If a ratification is announced on Thursday, this will be followed by a shift of negotiations to Ford and General Motors, where the UAW will seek to force through similar rotten agreements. Among the proposals being discussed in the background is the introduction of a new third tier of "sub-assembly" workers at these companies.

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