

“The UAW cannot be trusted”

Kokomo Fiat Chrysler workers kept in dark by UAW following strike vote

By Shannon Jones
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Two weeks after Fiat Chrysler workers at the company’s transmission operations in the Kokomo, Indiana area voted overwhelmingly for strike authorization, the United Auto Workers is maintaining a news blackout.

The overwhelming strike authorization vote demonstrated the determination of Kokomo transmission workers to fight. However, the UAW has no intention of leading a serious struggle over accumulated grievances and deteriorating conditions in the factories, including mistreatment of temporary part-time (TPT) workers.

Given the restive mood of workers, UAW Local 685 President Rick Ward felt compelled to warn against rumors of an impending strike. In a message to Kokomo transmission workers, he wrote, “I cannot emphasize enough, in the event we do strike YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED BY YOUR ELECTED UNION OFFICIALS ON THE FLOOR, anything else is pure B.S.”

The UAW has now issued a brief announcement that informational union meetings will be held on Monday, without providing any further details on negotiations.

On the part of Local 685 officials, talk of a strike over accumulated grievances is little more than political theatre. Local officials are attempting to posture as stalwart defenders of workers interests under conditions in which top UAW officials have been implicated in a corrupt scheme to divert money from joint training centers to fund lavish spending.

The fact that UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Cindy Estrada has been involved in negotiations is a further warning of the bogus nature of the talks.

Estrada played a central role in ramming through the 2015 sellout contract. Meanwhile, her private charity is under investigation for possible corrupt activities related the widening UAW scandal.

No demands have been issued by the UAW, and talks are being conducted under a news blackout. Whatever agreement is reached, it will not address conditions in the plant that motivated the near unanimous strike vote, such as the super exploitation of TPT workers.

The 2015 sellout agreement that passed under suspicious circumstances gave the auto companies the greenlight to flood the plants with TPT workers, who are at the mercy of management. Miserable wage increases for regular employees are being eaten up by inflation, as the UAW long ago abandoned cost of living adjustments.

In a statement published July 30, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* called for the formation of rank-and-file strike committee to take charge of the struggle, including control over negotiations and the nullification of the corrupt contracts negotiated by the UAW.

The factory committee must insist that it has representatives at all negotiations, so it can report on them to the rank and file. Workers should have two weeks to view and discuss the full details of any deal that is reached.

FCA workers in Kokomo must link their struggle with those of workers at the other auto plants and other sections of workers coming into struggle, including 250,000 UPS workers and teachers.

A veteran transmission plant worker in Kokomo said, “They haven’t told us anything. We are just on standby.”

Asked what he thought the main issues were, he said, “There are a lot of contract violations.” He noted there was a heavy turnover of TPT workers. “I see a lot of people coming in and out. My concern is they are trying to get rid of legacy workers.”

He said that workers were outraged about the reports of corruption at the highest levels of the UAW. “It is horrible with this corruption. They are just a part of the company. How can they represent us?”

About the strike vote he noted, “It could be a big front. There has only been one strike since I have been here, and that lasted just five hours. All the guys here are aware how things are run.”

Rocky, a recently retired FCA Kokomo transmission worker, said that workers he had contacted were being kept in the dark by the UAW. He said there were rumors about Chrysler moving out product from Kokomo, noting the Indiana Transmission Plant II in Kokomo had been indefinitely idled.

Rocky said he had followed developments in the UAW corruption scandal. “If I was still working, I wouldn’t listen to them,” he said. “They hung us retirees out to dry. They still take union dues out of my lousy little pension. When I turned 62, they forced me to go on Social Security. On top of that my health insurance went to hell. Medications went up because the trust [administered by the UAW] was underfunded.

“It is all about the big shots, to hell with the little guy.”

Another veteran worker said that at union meetings “When you get in there it is more like a dictatorship. They say, ‘This what the topic is will be,’ and they will only answer question about that issue.

“A UAW steward told an employee, ‘We are not going out on strike. We cannot afford to stop making the 8 speed (transmission),’ he said. Who is the ‘we?’ The company? Isn’t that the point of a strike to stop production?”

“We hear different things about why Transmission Plant II has been idled. At one point, we were told they were re-tooling. There are rumors that work is being outsourced. People are baffled by it. At the same time they keep hiring TPT workers.

“The UAW cannot be trusted. At every turn people are saying it, including the TPTs.”

Asked about the fact that UAW was keeping silent on the negotiations the worker added, “If you don’t have

anything to hide, why are you keeping it a secret. Why are you telling us to stay off social media like the UAW posted on their website?”

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