

Anger mounts among FCA workers as UAW prepares to ram through sellout deal

By Jerry White
2 December 2019

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter will host a call Thursday, December 5, 7 pm EST to discuss a strategy to fight the sellout of FCA workers and mobilize autoworkers against the global assault on jobs and wages. To register, go to: wsws.org/autocall.

The United Auto Workers reported over the weekend that it had reached a tentative agreement with Fiat Chrysler (FCA) for a new contract covering 47,000 hourly FCA workers. The UAW said it would present the deal to its national UAW-FCA Council for backing on Wednesday and that locals would begin to hold ratification votes on Friday, December 6.

Displaying her contempt for rank-and-file workers, UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada declared, “Out of respect for our members, we will refrain from commenting any further or releasing full details of the agreement until the UAW-FCA Council leaders meet and review the details.” This means workers will be rushed to vote just days after local officials rubber-stamp it, leaving workers little or no time to study and discuss the document, which will be hundreds of pages.

“Our UAW Bargaining Committee worked diligently, over many months, during the General Motors strike and Ford negotiations to maintain productive negotiations with FCA,” Estrada, director of the UAW-FCA Department, said in a statement. Estrada claimed that the company had previously agreed to \$4.5 billion in investments and that “negotiators secured an additional \$4.5 billion for a total of \$9 billion of investments adding 7,900 jobs during the contract period.”

UAW Acting President Rory Gamble praised the company, saying, “FCA has been a great American success story thanks to the hard work of our members. We have achieved substantial gains and job security provisions for the fastest growing auto company in the United States,” Gamble said.

In fact, any expansion by FCA over the last decade has

been based on the UAW providing the Italian-American automaker with the lowest labor costs of the so-called Big Three automakers. FCA executives systematically bribed UAW officials to sign sweetheart labor deals in 2009, 2011 and 2015, which reduced hourly labor costs for FCA by one-third.

This was detailed in a federal racketeering lawsuit filed by General Motors November 20 in US District Court in Detroit. GM charged that its rival had gained an unfair competitive advantage through its “purchase” of the UAW, which the lawsuit defined as an “FCA-control enterprise.” This included the UAW tipping off FCA executives that it would not enforce limits on the number of second-tier workers, which were supposed to be restored in the 2015 contact.

“From this private understanding purchased through the conspiracy that FCA would not be subject to a Tier Two cap,” GM’s attorneys wrote, “FCA hired Tier Two workers with abandon, possessing the incredibly valuable foreknowledge that it would not be penalized by any reinstatement of the cap. By 2015, Tier Two workers made up around 42 percent of the UAW membership at FCA—double the proportion of Tier Two workers at GM.” In addition to second-tier workers, FCA also has the highest percentage of temporary workers, 13 percent.

Last week, Estrada described the exposure of the systematic bribing of UAW officials as “a few outside distractions” that would not stop the UAW from quickly reaching an agreement with FCA. As for Gamble, who is supposedly leading a “clean-up” of the UAW by establishing an internal ethics oversight body and corruption “hotline” phone number, he reiterated the UAW’s ludicrous claim that FCA payoffs to UAW negotiators had no impact on “collective bargaining.”

The UAW has signed agreements with GM and Ford that will all but remove caps on the hiring of temps over the course of the next four years and maintain two-tier

wages and benefits among full-time workers. While declaring that the UAW is following “pattern bargaining” in its deal with FCA, it remains to be seen whether the UAW granted FCA an even sweeter bargain to allow it to maintain its position as a low-cost automaker.

After more than a decade of having concessionary contracts rammed down their throats, rank-and-file workers greeted the news of the tentative agreement with anger. “When will the international give the workers at Chrysler their money back?” a veteran worker at the Kokomo Transmission Plant said. “It was flat out stolen from the workers for a service that they never received from the UAW.”

A tier-one worker at the Marysville, Michigan transmission plant added, “If we don’t like the deal, we will vote it down. A strike right now would hurt them bad. Sterling Heights Assembly is getting ready to build the new T Rex truck, and they are building a new plant in Detroit. FCA is making a lot of money. We are making them millions. At our plant, we are shipping out 40 loads of axles a day.”

Workers at Marysville Axle have sued both the UAW and FCA over a pattern of collusion involving the transfer of operations of the plant to German auto parts maker ZF. Workers are alleging that former UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell and others signed a corrupt deal to help FCA unload the facility in order to slash costs.

“We want to get back what we gave up to make them profitable,” the worker said. “That includes cost of living. Right now, our labor costs are below Ford and General Motors. There should be a lawsuit filed against the company and the union over that.”

There is a concerted effort by the UAW and Fiat Chrysler to get better-paid, older workers out of the plant, he added. “We want to make sure there is no corrupt deal between the UAW and ZF. We are working without a local contract. I don’t want to leave the plant. It is my home plant, and I am proud of what we do. With ZF running the plant, they won’t honor our past contract--no seniority, no bids. That’s corrupt. We won’t leave until we are forced out.”

A temporary part-time (TPT) worker at the Toledo, Ohio Jeep complex said the revelations in the lawsuit by GM against FCA were being widely discussed in the plant. “Talking to other workers, what we are finding out is having an impact,” he said. “The contracts with Ford or GM were no good either.

“We need a better path for TPTs to full time and better overall pay and benefits. Right now, TPTs don’t get

either vision or dental. If TPTs miss one day they can fire you. That is why there is such a high turnover.”

The planned merger of FCA with French-based PSA, which is the parent company of Peugeot, Citroen and former GM brand Opel, would create the fourth largest automaker in the world, behind Nissan-Renault, VW and Toyota.

The merger is part of a global restructuring of the auto industry in the face of growing signs of another worldwide economic slowdown, saturated markets in North America, Japan and Europe, and a precipitous decline in China, India and other so-called emerging markets.

The auto giants are engaged in a brutal struggle over profits and control of the emerging market for electric and self-driving vehicles and other new technologies. The latter will require fewer parts and workers, who will largely be low-paid contract workers. Over the last week alone, German corporations Audi and Daimler have announced nearly 20,000 layoffs, following earlier cuts by GM, Ford, Nissan and VW.

In opposition to the global strategy of the transnational corporations, autoworkers need their own internationally coordinated strategy to fight to defend the rights of all workers to secure and good-paying jobs.

The prerequisite for a fightback is to build rank-and-file factory committees, independent of and in opposition to the corrupt company agents of the UAW. Fiat Chrysler workers should mobilize now to demand the release of the full contract, a full two weeks to study and discuss it before any ratification vote, and rank-and-file supervision of the voting process to prevent the stuffing of ballots by the UAW.

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