

UAW emails autoworkers: We won't tell you anything

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With less than a week remaining until the contract expires for 140,000 autoworkers at Ford, General Motors and Fiat-Chrysler, United Auto Workers Vice President Cindy Estrada sent a revealing email to 51,000 GM workers.

It is impossible, Estrada wrote, “to accurately report to you the specifics of our daily conversations or any tentative agreements that we have reached.”

Translation: the UAW will keep you in the dark for as long as it takes to ram through another sell-out contract.

The UAW is growing increasingly nervous about widespread hostility to the conspiracy of silence and the union's refusal to share any information about the negotiations with workers. As the *Detroit News* notes in a September 8 article, “Some workers have taken to social media to voice concerns over a lack of communication from the national bargaining teams to the 141,000 UAW-represented members at the Detroit automakers.”

Estrada's email declares, “... your continued solidarity will be needed in the days that lie ahead. Unfortunately,” she adds, “the rumor mill will test that solidarity. As the deadline approaches, we expect the conversations on the shop floor to pick up, and public media reporting to intensify. Don't believe everything you hear or read!”

Translation: don't read anything and don't listen to anybody who questions the UAW's absolute authority to sell you out.

Estrada's email and a previous posting on the UAW International Facebook page urging workers to disregard “opinionated media outlets or articles regarding contract talks” is a measure of their fear of workers, and in particular, the growing influence of the *World Socialist Web Site* Autoworker Newsletter. This was confirmed in a September 3 piece by *Detroit News*

business columnist Daniel Howes. The UAW efforts to prevent opposition from below has thus far been successful, he says, “with the exception of speculation by a few hard-left websites creating minor annoyances for the UAW, the threat so far has been contained.”

Far from being a “minor” problem, the UAW is very aware of the danger of workers being informed and politically armed to fight for their own interests.

Estrada's email continues: “The solutions we may be discussing can be complex and have implications beyond what is most apparent, and as our discussions continue, the proposed solutions may change. In short, negotiating a contract covering tens of thousands of workers employed at diverse locations across the country is a very complex and fluid process.”

Does the UAW think workers are a bunch of fools? First they tell workers not to read anything; then they tell workers not to trust their own eyes, let alone their bitter experiences. After all, the UAW functionary insists, it may be “apparent” that another betrayal is in the making but workers should trust the UAW because they simply cannot understand the “complexities” of high-level negotiations.

That such a betrayal is being prepared is no mere speculation. The UAW has spent the last 35 years dismantling all of the achievements won in generations of struggle, in the name of defending the profits of the corporations. Over the past several months, UAW executives have insisted they would not negotiate any agreement, which would make the companies “uncompetitive” (Williams) or “put them out of business” (UAW Vice President James Settles, Jr.).

At the end of the special bargaining convention in March, UAW President Dennis Williams, expressed support for the establishment of a new third tier of so-called sub-assembly workers making even lower wages

than current second tier workers. More recently, he offered to help the employers slash health care costs by expanding the VEBA retiree trust fund to current employees, a move that would force workers into inferior and more expensive plans, while handing the UAW another multi-billion dollar business.

Even if workers accept the claim that an agreement would be very complex, that is only an argument for presenting the full details of the contract. This includes a line-by-line copy with all the normally concealed “letters of understanding,” the major briefs presented by both sides in reaching the agreement, notes from the union and the company, and any other relevant material used to reach the agreement.

The real reason the UAW won’t give these details is because if workers knew what was being planned they would rebel against this gang of company agents.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter issues the following warning: everything the UAW says is a lie. The UAW is committed to a further destruction of jobs and living standards. Furthermore, it is entirely probable that the UAW already knows the details of the agreement and is focused entirely on how to force the rotten deal through.

Autoworkers must take it upon themselves to build rank-and-file committees that are free from the authority of the UAW. In every factory workers should elect such committees, made up of the most militant and self-sacrificing workers, to mobilize the ranks to demand that all the details of the contract negotiations be made public immediately.

It is preposterous that the 140,000 autoworkers that will have to labor under the terms of the contract are the only ones who are not allowed to read it from top to bottom. Workers have the right to know all of the details, including points on Alternative Work Schedule, the VEBA scheme, tiered wages, the pace of the assembly line, the timing of work breaks, the length of bathroom breaks and workplace safety precautions.

They must know what the contract says about the procedure for stopping production when a worker is hurt at work, the status of transfer employees and the ability of transfers to be with their families, sick days, back-pay, longer-term medical leave, management’s arbitrary “case pending” disciplinary measures, any other issues that workers want to raise.

Rank-and-file committees must demand that the full contract—not bogus “highlights”—be presented to workers with all relevant accompanying documents weeks in advance of any vote. A few weeks to study the contract is a small amount of time compared with the four years or more during which time workers will have to bear the burden of the contract terms. Workers have the right to know what they are signing-up for.

The committees will demand that no signing bonus be dangled over the heads of workers to force a “yes” vote—the company and union must not be allowed to use the pressures of economic hardship brought on by the prior sell-out contracts they negotiated to force an even worse set of terms.

Further, the union must not be allowed to use the terms of the contract to pit workers against one another and force a split vote that guarantees the passage of a bad contract. The UAW’s policy of different wages for the same work was aimed at turning workers against one another and undermining working class unity—such pro-company tricks must be opposed.

Through the formation of rank-and-file committees, the overwhelming majority of autoworkers must raise these issues as demands, and not as petitions to the UAW. The workers must conduct a massive campaign amongst themselves and with their class allies in other industries in the US and internationally to wage a unified fight against the companies and their union cronies. It is only on this basis that workers can begin to wage an international counteroffensive against decades of devastating sellouts imposed by the union-company alliance.



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