

As contract deadline passes

Autoworkers denounce UAW sabotage of wages fight

Eric London
15 September 2015

Hours have passed since the 12:01 a. m. Tuesday expiration of the contracts covering 141,000 autoworkers at General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler. Ignoring a 98 percent strike vote by workers, the UAW allowed the deadline to pass with only a curt statement on its Facebook page.

As the contract expired, 37,000 Chrysler workers—whose company had been selected as the union’s “strike target” just the night before—had no idea whether or not to report to work on midnight and morning shifts. Earlier in the day, various union locals issued strike instructions and prepared picket signs for workers chaffing to walk out.

Demonstrating its contempt for workers, at 12:11 a.m. Tuesday the International Union’s Facebook page issued a one sentence statement: “The UAW and FCA US LLC announced this evening that they have extended the existing collective bargaining agreement on an hour by hour basis as 2015 bargaining continues.”

Workers around the country expressed their disgust with the UAW and determination to fight. While the corporations have made record profits, senior autoworkers have not seen a raise in more than a decade while tens of thousands of workers hired after 2007 labor for half pay under the UAW’s hated two-tier wage system.

In an earlier period, the refrain of autoworkers was “no contract, no work.” Today, the UAW’s line is, “no contract, no problem” and gratuitous contract extensions that only help the company are standard. On Monday, GM and Ford also announced contract extensions and their willingness to work with their “UAW partners” to reach “competitive” contracts.

The UAW is following the treacherous pattern of unions across the country, which have either extended contracts or forced workers to work without contracts in order to

prevent strikes by workers at US Steel, ArcelorMittal, Verizon, the US Post Office and school districts in Chicago, Pittsburgh and Detroit. Allied with the Obama administration, which has made cheap labor the center of its economic policy, the unions are desperately seeking to block any strike that could become a catalyst for a broader movement of the working class against unprecedented social inequality.

At factories across the US, autoworkers were livid. “I believe that Chrysler workers are ready for a real fight against any powers standing in the way of a better living,” a Chrysler worker from Kokomo, Indiana told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “I think we have power only through numbers.”

There is a tangible fear on behalf of the union and the companies that deep anger amongst workers might grow out of control. UAW Local 862 in Louisville, Kentucky sent an update to workers yesterday saying, “Please be patient and continue to perform your jobs until a different direction has been given!”

A notice from Local 685 in Kokomo says if there is a strike, workers must “LEAVE THE PLANT AND GO HOME UNLESS you have already been scheduled for picket duty.” In other words, the UAW says: don’t occupy the plants and make it impossible for the company to run the plants with scab labor.

“I agree with your articles and I’m so damn pissed I can hardly see straight,” one Ford Louisville Assembly worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “There seems to be a lot of tension at the plant. Everyone I have spoken with is very angry about the choice of the target company.”

The selection of Chrysler is seen by autoworkers as an indication that the UAW is preparing for a sellout. In the words of an autoworker from GM’s Marion Stamping,

“Are they kidding us? So the UAW selects the company with the weakest financials and the largest number of entry-level employees as the target. I can see where this latest plan for failure is headed. No raises for legacy employees. I’m sure the final solution to ending two tier pay will be to end the top tier.” (See: “Why the UAW picked Fiat Chrysler”)

There is also widespread opposition to the UAW’s plan to shift health care to a so-called co-op controlled by the union. Such a plan was hailed by the pro-company *Detroit News*, which wrote an editorial this weekend titled “UAW contract must contain health costs.”

“It’s horrible,” said another Louisville autoworker. “They’re taking away everything. What was the first thing the workers did in the 1930s? They organized. Then they got equal pay for equal work, then they got health care. Now they’re taking away everything. It’s unreal.

“I haven’t talked to one person in the plant that wants the health co-op. I haven’t found anybody. Ask a retiree what they think of VEBA. Why do you think the UAW wants to put us all in the co-op? Because they’re all trustees and they’ll all get payoffs and kickbacks from Wall Street. [UAW negotiating team members] Jewell, Settles, Williams—they get kickbacks along with their six figure salaries. And if they give us a raise this health care scheme will wipe it out anyway.”

The union knows it faces widespread opposition, which is why its plan is to continue to keep workers in the dark through the unprecedented level of secrecy in the contract talks.

A Chicago Assembly worker with four years said, “We’ve been told pretty much nothing about the contract. I am not confident in the union and the way I am being represented.”

A third Louisville Assembly worker said, “we know nothing” about the negotiations, “but I know what’s coming from the things I read. I’ve read all of the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter articles and I wish every autoworker would read them. We need all of them to read this.”

A GM Wentzville, Missouri worker said, “the UAW will extend every contract because they have no intention of fighting the companies.”

Faced with growing opposition, the UAW is collaborating with the corporations to swindle workers and push through another sellout. As always it will use the threat of plant closings and mass layoffs to batter down resistance. But the various “job security” contracts signed by the UAW, based on decades of concessions, have

never saved a single job.

The UAW will no doubt use a signing bonus as a bribe to pass a rotten deal. Autoworkers know that the bigger the bonus, the worse the deal. As a Louisville autoworker put it, “You take the bonus to pay off debt, and you rack up debt until the next bonus. For the most part, we’re all broke—we get by, but life is expensive.”

Another option would be for the UAW to call limited strikes, either in isolated plants, strikes of very short duration, or both. “Workers in Toledo are saying they’re walking at midnight,” said the same Louisville worker. “We had a big discussion at the lunch table about how the union will only pick a specific plant and not strike with all of us, which is how it should be.”

Another Louisville worker said: “Everyone wants a strike but our union so-called representatives.”

Autoworkers must be forewarned: Even if the union called a strike it would only be a cynical maneuver aimed at letting off steam and trying to revive its own credibility, while behind the scenes if prepared another monumental betrayal. The union pulled such a stunt in 2007 when it called a bogus two-day “Hollywood strike” at GM, and a six-hour strike at Chrysler, before it signed the deal, which created the two-tier system and the VEBA.

Autoworkers must take the conduct of this struggle out of the hands of the company and government agents in the UAW. The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of rank-and-file action committees, democratically controlled by workers and free from the authority of the UAW and the big business politicians. These committees must fight for united action by all workers in the US to recoup decades of lost wages and link up this struggle with workers in Mexico, Canada, Europe, Asia and around the world.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact