

As autoworker militancy mounts, UAW issues “strike notice” to Fiat Chrysler

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The United Auto Workers informed Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) management Tuesday that it will cancel the extended labor contract with the company and could call a strike if no new agreement is reached before 11:59 PM Eastern Time tonight (October 7).

The strike notice is the latest in a series of improvisations carried out by the UAW following last week’s landslide “no” vote on a deal that was supported by both the union and FCA management. The UAW did not expect, let alone desire, the rejection of its sellout agreement. It is now in evident disarray, casting about for a policy and not quite sure how to proceed.

The UAW reported a tentative agreement with the auto company on September 15, only one day after it announced that it was selecting FCA as the target company. There were no negotiations in the traditional sense of the term. The UAW was presented with a contract that had been drawn up by the company, which it assumed it could simply force through in shotgun votes before workers could consider what they were voting on.

These plans were disrupted when the workers intervened. Opposition was organized through Facebook and other social media, with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* playing a central role in providing workers with information on the contract and countering the lies of the company and the UAW.

In response, both the FCA and the UAW have made clear that there is no better deal on the table. Last week, UAW President Dennis Williams told a meeting of union officials that “there is no more money in the pot.” Among the possibilities the UAW has considered are forcing FCA workers to vote again on the same or a similar contract or beginning negotiations with Ford or General Motors in the hope that a “yes” vote at one of

these companies will shift the momentum against the workers.

The strike notice has been forced on the UAW by the action of the rank-and-file. From the standpoint of the UAW, however, a strike would be aimed at providing it with a cover to accept an agreement dictated by the company. If the UAW does call a strike, it is likely to involve only a fraction of the 40,000 FCA workers at few selective plants. This is exactly what the UAW did in 2007, when it called a two-day “Hollywood strike” at GM and a six-hour walkout at Chrysler before agreeing to the hated two-tier wage system.

The corporate-controlled media is well aware of the purpose of such a cynical maneuver. “There remains the possibility that the sides are making real progress and strike preparations are merely theater to appease UAW members angry at union leaders for the deal last month that fell well short of their expectations,” the *Detroit Free Press* wrote Tuesday. “From the UAW point of view, it would almost be more politically astute to get everyone to go out on strike if it were a way to serve as a safety valve,” Detroit labor attorney Gary Klotz told the newspaper.

According to a “UAW source” cited by the industry web site *Automotive News*, the UAW may strike a few plants in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. This would allow the UAW to pay as little as possible out of its \$600 million strike fund, while workers at other plants, laid off due to a shortage of parts, would be forced to sign up for unemployment benefits.

At the same time, the UAW and the AFL-CIO have escalated their attacks on the WSWS, resorting to desperate measures in an attempt to counter the anger of workers. In a statement posted on the UAW Facebook page on Monday, Williams blamed “outside groups” that “like to stir people up” for the “no” vote.

This was followed Tuesday by a statement released by Bruce Miller, chief legal counsel for the AFL-CIO in Metro Detroit, specifically attacking the WSWS. Calling the *World Socialist Web Site* an “outside vulture... seeking to take advantage of the crisis to push their own agenda,” Miller wrote: “These folks want to see turmoil in the UAW because it is out of turmoil they hope a new revolution will come.”

Responding to these statements, Jerry White, editor of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, said: “The UAW is attacking the *Autoworker Newsletter* because it is the only place where workers can get information and find their interests and grievances expressed.” He added, “This sort of red-baiting will not fool workers. They will see it for what it is: a transparent attempt to delegitimize opposition in order to ram a rotten contract through.”

White added, “The UAW has complete contempt for its membership, thinking that workers cannot recognize a rotten agreement when they see it. They have not refuted anything that the WSWS has written and exposed.”

Autoworkers continue to show a tremendous level of anger and militancy, with many anxious to wage a struggle against the auto companies. In answer to Williams’ talk of “outside agitators,” one worker posted on Facebook: “Remember, an agitator is the thing in the washing machine that shakes the dirt loose.”

Workers should remain on their guard. Absolutely no confidence can be placed in the UAW. The momentum and vigilance of workers must be taken to the next stage by organizing rank-and-file factory committees, led by the most militant and class-conscious workers in every factory.

If workers are to wage a serious battle against FCA, which is backed by all of the auto corporations and their Wall Street investors, then rank-and-file workers must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW, which is undemocratic and unaccountable to the membership.

A serious struggle would require: 1) A strike involving all FCA plants and facilities; 2) The mobilization of workers at GM and Ford to shut down the entire auto industry; 3) An appeal for support sent out to workers throughout the US and internationally who are also facing relentless attacks on their jobs and

living standards.

Such a struggle would immediately lead to a confrontation with the Obama administration, which used the 2009 bankruptcy of GM and Chrysler to expand the two-tier system and shift the burden of health care costs onto the backs of workers. This became the model for an attack on every section of the working class and, along with the Wall Street bailout, helped fuel the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in American history.

The auto bosses, the UAW, the big business politicians and all the defenders of the capitalist profit system are dangerous enemies, but the working class is more powerful. If autoworkers can break free of the chains of the UAW company union, they can begin a counteroffensive by the entire working class, including steelworkers, telecom workers, teachers and other public sector workers, to restore decades of givebacks by the unions and fight for social equality.

Everything now depends on the independent initiative of workers. Workers cannot allow themselves to be betrayed once again by the corporate stooges at Solidarity House. In this fight, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will continue to arm workers with the information and political strategy they need and to fight to mobilize the working class in the US and around the world to support this critical battle.



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