

UAW officials spout company line

Jerry White
5 November 2015

The United Auto Workers and its PR firm BerlinRosen are pulling out all the stops in their effort to ram through a sellout agreement with General Motors.

After workers in Fairfax, Kansas voted “no” by a large majority this past weekend, UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada held a conference call with local union officials from GM plants across the country. One official who later spoke to the *Detroit Free Press* said Estrada was worried about a repeat of the FCA debacle, when workers overwhelmingly rejected the first contract presented by the UAW.

According to a Facebook post by Vicki Hale, president of the Fairfax local, the International reps gave them the line: If the contract is defeated, the UAW would have no choice but to call a strike that “absolutely does not guarantee further gains.” If workers pressed for more it would “come out of the \$1.9 billion in production allocation money.” In other words, the UAW is putting the gun of mass layoffs to the head of workers to break their resistance.

As union officials followed instructions to deliver this line to workers, the UAW and its PR firm rolled out a video on the UAW GM Talks Facebook page that included, among others, GM national bargaining committee officials Todd McDaniel from UAW Local 362 in Bay City, Michigan and Barry Campbell from UAW Local 598 in Flint, Michigan.

The basic line from the UAW executives is that GM is willing to spend only so much money on the contract. A fight for decent-paying jobs will be fruitless, and workers should just take what the company offers them. As it was once said, “The mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” In making such arguments, the UAW exposes itself as a tool of management and a propagandist for the company line.

Feigning sympathy with autoworkers who are determined to recoup their losses now that GM is

making record profits, McDaniel begins with the damning admission, “We have active workers that hire in when they first start that are making less for working 40 hours a week... than some of our retirees.”

But accepting poverty wages, McDaniel insists, is the only way to keep your jobs. “When there is only so much money out there, it’s that push of maintaining job security that is killing us.”

He added, “Does the company have the money? Yes. Should they be paying it? Yes. Do our members, active and retired, deserve it? Yes. Can we get it all and still maintain jobs? No. We can only get so much without driving them over the border.”

For nearly four decades, the UAW—whose functionaries never take a pay cut—has insisted that endless sacrifices were needed to “save jobs.” While workers have been steadily impoverished through such concessions, this did nothing to stop the destruction of 1 million jobs at GM, Ford and Chrysler since 1979.

McDaniel’s Bay City powertrain plant is a case in point. The factory now has fewer than 300 workers, down from about 4,000 in the 1970s. GM only decided to keep bare-bones production going at the facility after the UAW agreed to concessions to make the plant “more competitive,” and after the impoverished city granted GM a 50-year tax abatement, the longest in state history.

Also on the video was Campbell, the chairman of Local 598 in Flint. Taking a “militant” posture, he says, “When we pass the demands of [workers] to management... they also have a stack of demands too. And it’s.. not a path to a better wage and benefits... it’s a path to make them more profitable at the expense of the workers. I think our membership understands that GM wants some things, but I don’t think they understand the amount of things that GM would like to take back from us.”

In a Facebook post Campbell added, “Your

bargaining team had some very tough decisions to make to secure our investment for job security... Was it everything we wanted? No, but I'm very confident we took GM to the edge with a long and tiring fight."

Long and tiring? Who is he kidding? What did UAW President Dennis Williams do? Threaten not to go golfing with GM executives?

In fact, there was no fight at all. The deal was worked out well in advance of any bogus "strike deadlines" and "last minute" settlements. It was an agreement between two business entities over how to increase the exploitation of autoworkers and divvy up the spoils. The only "long and tiring fight" the UAW is engaged in is against the resistance of rank-and-file workers.

In a Facebook post McDaniel warns, "I know there are people out there saying vote NO because this is only the 'first' offer...I firmly believe this agreement has all of the total cash value that we will get without a strike."

A strike would "come at great cost," McDaniel threatens, adding, "1st our members, many of whom aren't prepared, may be out of work for many weeks or even months. 2nd we may not be able to get any job guarantees in an agreement after a strike and without work it's only a matter of time before we close a few more plants making us even weaker in 2019 talks..."

"3rd in order for a strike to be effective, you need public support. I don't believe we will have it. The public, in many cases already, views us as over paid, lazy, and greedy. When the media starts reporting the economic gains we said NO to, do you really think they will support us?"

Back in the days of the Flint sit-down strikes, if anyone were to get up at a meeting and spout out such drivel, he would be immediately labeled a company agent and "stool pigeon." But that was long ago. Today, Williams, Estrada and their flunkies on the regional and local level are proud to be known as "company men."

Why should autoworkers be forced to bear a "great cost" of a strike when the UAW is sitting on a \$600 million strike fund? This is enough to pay all 53,000 GM workers \$1,000 a week in strike benefits for three months. The only cost would be to the UAW executives who have long used the money as a personal slush fund.

As for not winning public support, this is another lie.

Millions of workers in the steel, telecom, airline and other industries, as well as teachers and other public sector workers, are facing the same attack on their jobs, health benefits and pensions. If autoworkers broke through the chains of the UAW and began a serious struggle against the money-mad corporate executives and Wall Street criminals, it would become a catalyst for a powerful counteroffensive by the entire working class. At the same time, it could lay the basis for a common fight of autoworkers in the US, Mexico and around the world against the attack on jobs and living standards by the global auto giants.

The UAW is opposed to such a struggle because it would disrupt the union business executives' lucrative relations with the corporations and the government. The UAW is not a "workers' organization" but a corporate-labor syndicate and industrial police force, which is paid billions in cash and corporate stocks to strangle the opposition of workers to the corporations' dictates.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact