

Mobilize the working class behind Indiana autoworkers

Kokomo Fiat Chrysler workers: Form a rank-and-file strike committee to fight for jobs and safety!

The World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter
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A little over a week after thousands of autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler Automobile's Kokomo and Tipton, Indiana, transmission plants voted almost unanimously to authorize strike action, the United Auto Workers union is accelerating its efforts to cobble together a worthless settlement behind the backs of rank-and-file workers.

The fact that the UAW has no intention to conduct a real fight is proven by the fact that UAW Vice President for FCA Cindy Estrada reportedly took part in closed-door discussions over the weekend. Estrada is a corrupt bureaucrat who has been investigated in connection with the ongoing bribery scandal. She is responsible for ramming the 2015 sellout agreement past the opposition of General Motors workers who have since faced a wave of mass layoffs and plant closing threats.

Any agreement worked out in secret between the UAW and FCA will not be worth the paper it is written on. It would resolve none of the fundamental issues—including unsafe working conditions and the ongoing super-exploitation of temporary part-time (TPT) workers—which motivated the near unanimous vote to strike.

It was the UAW that gave the FCA the green light to lift the cap on the number of TPTs the company could employ in the 2015 contract. Far from defending workers, the UAW has spent decades colluding with the Ford, GM and Chrysler bosses to destroy the hard-won gains of generations of autoworkers. In exchange for payoff from the companies, the UAW dismantled workplace protections, shredded benefits and pensions, and implemented the hated two-tier (now multi-tier) system.

For their part, Local 685 officials took no action to protect workers and allowed an estimated 200 grievances to pile up.

The UAW International and local union officials called the strike vote to let workers blow off steam, while trying to convince workers that they are really fighting for workers' rights. This is nonsense. They are stooges of the company who will do everything they can to prevent workers from disrupting their profits.

But Kokomo workers refuse to be industrial slaves. A fight is necessary, but it is up to the rank and file to conduct it!

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers to immediately elect a rank-and-file strike committee to take conduct of this fight out of the hands of the UAW and prepare a genuine fight for safe working conditions and good-paying jobs for all. The committee must insist that it has representatives at all negotiations, so it can report on them to the rank and file. Workers should have two weeks to view and discuss the full details of any deal that is reached.

Workers should set a strike deadline. But a struggle must be prepared. First of all, workers must have full access to the union's \$600 million strike fund. The UAW Strike and Defense Fund, which is sustained by workers' dues money, belongs to the rank and file, not the corrupt company stooges at Solidarity House who fly first class on golf resort trips and buy \$10,000 Italian designer shoes.

In addition, Kokomo workers must establish worker-to-worker networks, independent of the UAW, to link up their fight with their brothers and sisters throughout FCA, GM and Ford to prepare a nationwide strike.

Just as in 2015, the UAW is terrified that workers are turning to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* for information because we are not controlled by the

corporations.

In a Facebook post Friday, Local 685 President Rick Ward wrote: “Any postings on any site other than the official UAW Local 685 site should be IGNORED! As the bargaining committee has said, our goal is to RESOLVE our issues. In the event of a strike, the membership will be notified by your elected officials. If anyone is telling you we are going to strike, they are LYING.”

As one worker from the nearby Tipton Transmission Plant said: “They don’t want us to know squat. Too much corruption is exposed and continues to be almost daily. Why wouldn’t there be a rebellion?”

Last Monday, Nancy Johnson, a former aide to ex-UAW Vice President for FCA Norwood Jewell, reached a plea deal with federal investigators in which she stated that a “high-level” UAW official issued the order to skim FCA training center funds. According to a source cited by the *Detroit News*, the official is Dennis Williams, UAW president from 2014 until this summer and secretary-treasurer prior to that.

Estrada has long sat on the board of the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources, better known as the “Center for Hidden Relatives” after bureaucrats’ relatives who have paid positions there, including Estrada’s stepdaughter.

This year, Estrada has earned even greater hatred for negotiating secret memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with GM, which sanctioned the layoff of over a thousand workers and their replacement with lower-paid subcontractors at the Lordstown Assembly Plant in Ohio and Lake Orion Assembly Plant in Michigan. Last week, Estrada heaped praise on FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne, the ruthless corporate executive who proclaimed that workers had to “accept a culture of poverty.”

Such an individual is not a representative of workers, but rather a corporate hatchet-woman. Like the UAW as a whole, she is deeply hostile to workers’ interests and is rewarded handsomely for her services. If she shows up at a meeting, workers should immediately call a vote of no confidence and order her out.

Everything depends on the initiative of the rank and file. Workers should act immediately to elect and organize a rank-and-file strike committee, independent of all national and local UAW officials, and set a deadline for a walkout.

It is critical that workers formulate their own demands, basing themselves on what they need, not what the companies and the UAW say they can afford.

Such demands should include:

*** No closed-door UAW-company discussions !
Rank-and-file control over negotiations!**

*** All bribery-tainted contracts should be declared null and void! Restore all past concessions!**

*** End the tier system! Immediate conversion of all workers to full-time and top pay!**

*** Abolish the Alternative Work Schedule and restore overtime after eight hours!**

*** Workers’ control over production!**

These demands will be supported by all workers, in the factories and everywhere else. In order to fight this giant corporation, which has the backing of both President Donald Trump and the Democrats, it is necessary to rally the broadest support from every section of the working class. The enemy may be strong, but workers in Kokomo have no less powerful allies: the millions of workers—workers throughout the auto industry, UPS workers, teachers, steelworkers and others—who face a similar struggle for safe and good-paying jobs, access to high quality health care, a secure retirement and more. The broadest appeal should be made by workers in Kokomo to mobilize the entire working class, in the US and around the world, behind their struggle.

The industrial mobilization of the working class must be combined with a new political strategy. Kokomo workers are not fighting just one ruthless company, but the entire capitalist set-up, which demands workers accept an ever lower standard of living while the super-rich gorge themselves on the wealth created by the working class. A socialist program is required, basing itself on the needs of the working class, rather the profit interests of the few.



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