Industry publication boasts: GM plant closures aimed at extorting more concessions from autoworkers

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In its coverage of the General Motors plant closure announcement, the *World Socialist Web Site* has stressed that one of the central aims of the job massacre is to intimidate 140,000 GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers whose contracts are expiring next summer and break their determination to win significant improvements in wages and working conditions from the highly profitable automakers.

This has been confirmed by the chief industry publication *Automotive News* in an article published Thursday, headlined, "GM sends bold message to UAW with potential plant closures." In the article, *Automotive News* reporter Michael Wayland acknowledges that GM made the announcement, carefully timed to precede the start of negotiations, not only to undermine workers' aspirations, but to soften them up for the imposition of even deeper concessions in the next labor agreements.

"While the negotiations don't officially kick off until next year, both sides have assembled their bargaining teams, and members are discussing what to focus on during the talks. As always, many UAW members want more: more raises, more profit-sharing, more everything," Wayland complains.

By announcing that no new products would be allocated to the Detroit-Hamtramck, Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario assembly plants, he boasts, "GM is managing UAW members' expectations" and "changing the narrative from members wanting more to potentially just wanting to save jobs and plants."

He quotes Kristin Dziczek of the corporate think tank Center for Automotive Research, who adds, "These are real stakes in front of the bargaining team next year for the negotiations. It might actually help the membership focus on jobs and survival more than getting more, more and more in terms of raises, benefits and bonuses."

Like the Mafia, the corporate executives are using the threat of plant closings, which would destroy tens of thousands of direct and related jobs and decimate entire communities, as a gun pointed at the heads of workers. Either they accept less pay, fewer benefits and conditions of industrial slavery or the workers and their families will starve.

This "bold message" is directed at rank-and-file workers, not the UAW or the Unifor union in Canada, which are co-conspirators in this extortion racket. Wayland expresses the hope of the auto bosses that the threatened shutdowns might help the UAW reassert its control over rebellious workers who see the union as nothing more than a corrupt tool of management.

GM's announcement, he says, "could actually be a blessing in disguise for UAW leaders, who are fighting an internal battle with members following a federal corruption scandal. If union leaders can save one, maybe two plants, they could be seen as heroes instead of company pawns, a view of several recent UAW leaders painted by federal prosecutors."

Any deal the UAW signs to keep a factory open, however, will come at a huge cost to workers. Wayland writes. "If any of the plants are saved, union members should read the fine print in the contract. Expect GM to demand untraditional employment practices such as an increase in temporary, subcontracted or outsourced workers."

"The UAW already opened the door for the practice at Orion Assembly in suburban Detroit with an Autonomous Vehicle Memorandum of Understanding that allows the automaker to offer reduced wages and benefits for some jobs," Wayland writes. This is a reference to the secret deal signed by then UAW Vice President for GM Cindy Estrada that allowed GM to contract work out to its wholly owned subsidiary GM Subsystems, which pays vastly lower wages.

Wayland continues: "The reality is GM has too many plants, legacy costs that remain unacceptable, and it doesn't see crunching metal as a long-term opportunity for growth and profits. The company likely wants to close the plants but could be persuaded to change its mind under the right circumstances."

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He concludes, "Collective bargaining between the UAW and Detroit automakers is a theatrical chess match. GM just raised the curtain with a bold move that sets the stage for the next year of negotiations."

Indeed, the contract "negotiations" are a well-orchestrated play where the performers pretend to represent antagonistic parties when in fact both the corporations and their bribed union "partners" are on the same side and workers are across the barricades on the other.

For the past 40 years, the UAW and its Canadian counterparts have asserted again and again that concessions were necessary to defend jobs. The companies, for their part, pocketed workers' givebacks and carried out mass layoffs and plant closings regardless.

It should be recalled that in the 2015 contract talks workers were overwhelmingly determined to win substantial wage increases after a seven-year freeze, restore the eight-hour day and abolish the hated two-tier wage and benefit system imposed in 2007 and expanded under Obama's 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler. On the eve of the opening of talks, Ford announced it was shifting production of its Focus compact and C-Max hybrid and plug-in models to Mexico after 2018, threatening the jobs of more than 4,000 workers at its Michigan Assembly Plant in the Detroit suburb of Wayne.

When the UAW came back with a contract that maintained the two-tier system and other concessions, including a proposal to shift current workers onto a union-run health care program, Fiat Chrysler workers rebelled, voting down the contract by a 2-to-1 margin in the first defeat of a UAW-backed national contract in three decades. The UAW was able to ram through a slightly refurbished deal and similar ones at GM and Ford only by resorting to lies and threats of more plant closures and layoffs amid allegations by workers of outright vote-rigging.

After relying on the UAW to do its dirty work, the auto executives boasted to Wall Street that the 2015 contracts kept labor cost increases below the rate of inflation and would facilitate the layoff of workers by vastly increasing the number of temporary part-time workers, who could be fired at will with no cost to the employer. The UAW also signed separate "competitive" agreements that included a third and fourth tier of lower-paid workers, supposedly to keep several GM and Ford facilities open.

The *Automotive News* article is a statement right out of the horse's mouth. The auto executives and the Wall Street financiers have no intention of granting the slightest concessions to workers even though the ruling class is choking on billions in profits. On the contrary, the corporate and financial oligarchy is reacting to the growth of strikes and mass protests against social inequality in the US and around the world by doubling down.

The GM plant closings must be fought. This struggle must be guided by the principle that a good-paying and secure job is non-negotiable and must be a social right guaranteed to all.

This fight will not be carried out by the corporate stooges in the UAW. Nor will the struggle be advanced by making fruitless appeals to Trump or the Democrats, who, despite their phony protests, defend the capitalist system and insist that the corporations have the right to throw workers onto the streets to defend their profits. The unions and the big business politicians want American and Canadian workers to blame workers in Mexico and China for this threat, not the capitalist owners.

If there is to be a struggle, and there must be, then it must be carried out by workers themselves. New organizations of struggle, factory and workplace committees, must be built that are independent of the corrupt unions and democratically controlled by rank-and-file workers themselves. These committees should link up workers across the targeted factories and the entire auto and auto parts industry throughout the US, Canada and other countries. They must unite with workers and young people in Detroit, the cities around the Lordstown plant, and in Oshawa, Ontario to fight.

As the brutal actions of GM make clear, this is a class struggle, a war between two irreconcilably opposed classes. The capitalist exploiters have thrown down the gauntlet. Now it is time for the working class to fight.

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter urges workers and young people to attend the public meeting to fight the GM closures and layoffs. The meeting will be held on December 9 at 2 p.m. at the Bert's Entertainment Complex, 2727 Russell Street in Detroit. Let us know you are attened and share the meeting info with your friends on Facebook.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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