

As UAW stonewalls about contract talks

Faurecia workers voice their anger and determination to fight

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More than two weeks have passed since the contract expired for autoworkers at a global parts manufacturer plant in Saline, Michigan, 40 miles west of Detroit, and only a few days remain before the contract extension granted by the United Auto Workers will expire. However, workers at the Faurecia factory which fabricates and assembles door parts and other interior components for Ford Motor Company, Tesla and other automakers, told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that UAW local 892 is steadfastly refusing to provide any information on the state of negotiations.

Workers expressed deep concern over the stonewalling by union operatives during the three-week extension that was imposed at the end of May without a discussion or a vote.

“We should hit them hard,” said one worker, noting that in the previous negotiations four years ago, the UAW gave up a \$1.00 per hour pay cut and allowed the company to reopen the deal after ratification to slash their health insurance. “We need to get our money back and a wage increase and restore Blue Cross insurance,” she continued.

Many workers are increasingly disgusted and angry. When they ask members of their negotiating committee what is going on, they are told that negotiators cannot reveal any information. Workers made their attitude known before negotiations began three months ago in a near-unanimous strike authorization vote.

“The UAW should have never given Faurecia an extension of the contract,” another worker explained. “They are getting ready to go on shutdown the first week of July.”

When factories close for scheduled retooling or maintenance, workers are entitled to be compensated. If they are on strike at the time, however, they lose those benefits. “The plant could be down a week or longer,” she added. “We don’t know.”

Thus the extension appears to be a means to force through another concessions contract. “The company would save a whole lot of money,” she said. “They have not given us a

newsletter or anything. What I want to know is why are the higher ups in the union letting them get away with this?”

Top negotiators for the UAW, including former UAW vice president Norwood Jewell, pled guilty to taking bribes from Fiat Chrysler executives in exchange for signing sweetheart contracts. Former UAW President Dennis Williams and other top UAW officials have also been implicated in the scandal involving the siphoning off of millions from the funds of UAW-management training centers over the course of many years.

Another worker who has been at the plant since 2011 reported that the union convened a meeting in the middle of the day shift on the Saturday following the extension. “You see what they do,” she said. “They held a meeting at 10:00 AM so that none of us could go. They aren’t saying anything. They cannot talk about the negotiations. That’s what they say.

“What was the purpose of voting for a strike if they are not going to do anything?” she continued. “You know how they lie. The union president kept on trying to pretend he did not understand what we were saying.

“They took a dollar an hour from us with the last contract (in 2015). Then they took our Blue Cross (health insurance) away in the middle of the contract. That should not be legal. What is the union doing if they are letting them get away with that?”

The UAW is determined to isolate Faurecia workers from other sections of workers coming into struggle. Last week the UAW shut down a strike by nurses it represents in Toledo, Ohio, forcing them back to work without releasing any details of the contract or the opportunity to vote. During the strike, the union ordered hospital support staff, who are also UAW members but under separate contract, to cross the picket lines of striking nurses.

“We are still fighting for holiday pay which they owe us,” the Faurecia worker continued. The company had unilaterally cut holiday pay and bonuses for many of the

workers. "They don't want to pay us anything," she said.

Faurecia workers face near-poverty level wages that force many workers have to work two full-time jobs for a total of at least 80 hours a week just to make ends meet. Safety and working conditions are also major issues.

"The last incident has given me a really bad feeling," she said. "One of the girls in production was feeling ill; and she went downstairs to medical and it was closed. By the time she got back upstairs, she perished. Some people said it was from a heart attack. But if medical had been open, she could have been alive today.

"She was the third female to die in the factory in less than a year. They happened basically four months apart. That has a lot to do with the conditions in the plant and the lack of decent medical care. The nurses are just as nasty as they can be."

She went on to explain the hated points system, which penalizes workers for taking medical leave as well as holiday leave. It is a means of punishing workers and setting them up to be fired. "They want all the high seniority people out and low seniority in, so they can bully them," she said.

The company recently installed locking steel gates to close off the bathrooms. The bathrooms are inadequate and not properly maintained, and both company and union blame the workers for the situation.

A new hire we talked to works at low pay after a year and a half at the plant and depends on overtime work to make ends meet. He reported a thirty percent reduction in his hours of work with no explanation and no compensating raise in pay.

As opposed to a contract negotiation, the situation at Faurecia can better be described as a contract conspiracy, in which the union and the company keep the workforce in the dark while they meet behind closed doors to impose another concessions agreement.

The contract talks at Faurecia take place just weeks before negotiations begin for the Detroit automakers, where contracts expire in mid-September. In 2015 the UAW forced through sellout contracts, over heavy rank-and-file opposition, expanding the number of super-exploited temporary part-time (TPT) workers. The negotiations saw a historic 2-1 rejection vote by Fiat Chrysler workers of the first contract presented by the UAW.

Workers at Faurecia, like those at the Detroit-based US carmakers, face overwork, insufficient time with their families, attacks on benefits, stagnating wages and the conversion of large parts of the workforce into contingent, part-time and third-party contract employees.

The contract fight at Faurecia takes place amid an ongoing upsurge of strike activity, both in the US and internationally. Workers all over the world from Sudan to Matamoros,

Mexico, where auto parts workers struck earlier this year in a powerful wildcat action, workers are determined to fight. However, the rotten, corporatist trade unions attempt to sabotage their struggles at every step.

Workers need militant, democratic, fighting organizations. However, the UAW and other unions are not genuine workers organizations. They are instead working to destroy workers' hard-won gains while pitting workers against each other in a fratricidal global race to the bottom.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the building of rank-and-file factory committees to be the independent voice of workers. These committees should unite all workers across all divisions, part-time, full-time or contract. They must advance demands corresponding to the needs of workers, not the profit requirements of management. This should include a substantial pay increase, the elimination of all tiers and the hiring of all temporary workers as full-time. An essential demand should be workers' control over health and safety issues as well as critical issues such as line speed.

Faurecia workers must not allow the UAW to isolate them. They must reach out to other auto parts workers in the US, Mexico, Canada and beyond to wage a common struggle. They must appeal as well to workers at the Detroit-based car companies, who face an impending contract deadline.

Any serious struggle to improve conditions will immediately pose a confrontation with the corporate-backed political establishment. That is why workers need a socialist political perspective based on the defense of the independent interests of the working class, not the enrichment of a few for private profit.

The *Autoworker Newsletter* encourages Faurecia workers to study the statement "Autoworkers must take the contract fight into their own hands," outlining the broader implications of the fight by workers in the auto industry. Workers interested in finding out more about how to carry forward this fight should contact the *Autoworker Newsletter*.



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