

Countdown to contract fight

Auto execs, UAW have a game plan: What will autoworkers do?

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26 June 2019

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is hosting a call-in meeting this Thursday at 7:30 p.m. We urge all autoworkers to attend.

Not many autoworkers regularly read the industry publication, *Automotive News*. A subscription to the business outlet is rather expensive, and its stories are generally dry. However, it often has the benefit of revealing what the automotive executives are actually thinking amongst themselves.

On June 19, *Automotive News* ran an article, “GM pushes for more temp workers as UAW talks loom.” Citing “people familiar with the automaker’s thinking,” it writes “GM is looking for more factories to adopt agreements like the one used by its electric-car plant in Orion, Mich. There, workers employed by a subsidiary called GM Subsystems LLC, pay staff in the plant less money for jobs such as handling parts and materials before they go to the assembly line. Four of GM’s 33 US plants have such contracts now.”

The article continues: “If GM can hire more temporary workers who are paid less and aren’t on the same health care plan, the automaker argues that it can offer job security for its unionized employees. GM would also like to find ways to reduce its roughly \$900 million annual health care bill for union employees, including by getting greater contributions from workers, the people said.”

The article notes that GM’s Japanese-owned rivals, Toyota, Honda and Nissan, already “staff their plants with about 20 percent temporary workers.” It complains that only “about 7 percent of GM’s staff are temps.” In other words, GM—which has made ten straight years of record profits—wants to at least triple the number of these highly exploited workers.

GM, along with Ford and Fiat Chrysler, intend to use the threat of more plant closings and layoffs to blackmail workers into accepting a new and even more brutal round of concessions. If they have their way, by the end of the four-year agreement autoworkers will be significantly poorer and more exploited.

The UAW has not said a word about GM’s plans. That is because the highly-paid UAW officials, who hold billions of dollars in GM corporate shares, agree with the corporation’s demands.

In 2015, the UAW tried to push through a so-called Health Care Co-op, which would slash hundreds of millions from the companies’ healthcare costs by extending the union-controlled retiree healthcare business—known as the VEBA—to all current hourly and salaried workers. There is little doubt that the companies and the UAW are planning to revive this cost-cutting scheme.

As for replacing higher-paid workers with third-party contract workers, the UAW already agreed to secret “memorandums of understanding” and “competitive operating agreements” that include contractors at several plants. Far from saving the factories, the Lordstown, Ohio, plant has been shut and the Detroit-Hamtramck plant is set to close in early 2020. Orion is filled with GM Subsystems workers who are little more than industrial slaves who can be hired and fired at will.

All the UAW executives are concerned about is that they continue to get dues from workers, who have to pay for the privilege of being exploited to the hilt.

The UAW is a cheap labor contractor that offers up the wages, working conditions and rights of workers in exchange for millions in illegal and legal bribes, which are funneled through the joint training centers and other

corporatist schemes.

The *Automotive News* has previously acknowledged that GM's plant closing announcement would help the UAW beat back the expectations of workers in the upcoming contracts. By not allocating products to plants, it wrote, GM is "changing the narrative from members wanting more to potentially just wanting to save jobs and plants."

This "could actually be a blessing in disguise for UAW leaders, who are fighting an internal battle with members following a federal corruption scandal." In other words, the UAW is preparing a snow job.

All of this confirms the warnings made by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that company and union officials are not heading into "negotiations," but strategy sessions where they will discuss how best to ram through another pro-company deal.

The auto bosses and their co-conspirators in the UAW have a game plan. Autoworkers know what is happening. The question is: What strategy do autoworkers have to fight back?

A struggle is possible, but workers need their own organizations. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers in every factory to organize rank-and-file factory committees to organize opposition. The first step is for workers to draw up a list of demands for the contract fight based on what workers and their families need, not what the corporations and the UAW say is affordable.

This should include:

- The abolition of all tiers!
- A 40 percent wage increase to make up for the loss of COLA and other raises.
- An end to all plant closings and layoffs. Rehire all laid off and victimized workers.
- Convert all temporary workers to full-time employees, with full benefits and job protections.
- For workers' control over production, line speed and safety.

A network of committees must be set up now to mobilize the collective power of all autoworkers—first- and second-tier, full-time, part-time and contract employees, young, old and retired. Such committees must demand that all negotiations be open to workers—no secret discussion! Any vote must be overseen by workers to ensure that there is no ballot stuffing and fraud on the part of the UAW.

Connected together in a global production and supply chain, strikes by any section of workers can quickly cripple production throughout the global auto industry. This was shown by the courageous wildcat strike by parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico, earlier this year. It is also why the UAW quickly shut down the strike at the Faurecia plant in Saline, Michigan, last week as parts shortages began to hit Ford's highly profitable F-150 pickup trucks.

Autoworkers must establish lines of communication between all factories, and between GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers, to prepare a national strike to shut down the auto industry. They should reject the anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese campaign by the UAW, Trump and the Democrats and appeal to workers in Mexico, Canada and around the world to carry out joint action against the global attack on autoworkers.

Everywhere workers are saying "enough is enough" to a system, capitalism, that impoverishes the working class so Wall Street bankers and capitalist owners can have more private jets and mansions. By building new organizations of struggle, controlled democratically by rank-and-file workers themselves, autoworkers will inspire and win the support of millions of workers in the US and the rest of the world who want to fight for social equality.

There is no time to lose. Join this fight today.

The WSWS urges autoworkers and supporters to sign up for the Autoworker Newsletter for frequent updates and to leave your comments or questions. Participate in the call-in meeting this Thursday at 7:30 p.m. to discuss the way forward.



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