

UAW attempts to block WSWs Autoworker Newsletter from covering contract talks

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On Monday, officials from the United Auto Workers (UAW) and Ford Motor Co. will do their ritual handshakes in front of the news cameras at the company's Dearborn, Michigan headquarters. This event, which will be followed by similar stage-managed affairs at the General Motors and Fiat Chrysler headquarters on Tuesday, will mark the official start of "negotiations" for new labor agreements covering 155,000 Ford, GM and FCA workers.

One industry analyst recently compared the process to "Kabuki theatre," that is, elaborate play acting. While the corporate-controlled media keeps up the charade that these are "tough negotiations" between two antagonistic parties, every worker knows the UAW is a tool of the auto bosses. The next two months before the September 14 contract expiration will be a behind-the-scenes conspiracy to work out how to ram another pro-company contract past the resistance of workers.

The opening of the talks is the occasion for reporters to publicly question UAW and corporate officials. This reporter emailed the public relations office of the UAW on July 8 asking for press credentials for the *World Socialist Web Site* to cover the event.

The day after, Brian Rothenberg, from the UAW International Public Relations Department in Detroit, sent the following curt reply:

"Official credentialing instructions to accredited news organizations that employ professional objective journalism standards."

Since the message made little sense, this reporter asked:

"Mr. Rothenberg, What exactly does your reply to my inquiry mean?"

The UAW PR man quickly responded:

"Official credentialing instructions will be sent to

accredited news organizations that employ professional objective journalism standards."

This reporter asked: "Mr. Rothenberg, Could you explain what your criteria is for 'professional objective journalism standards?' Does your list of UAW-accredited news organizations include the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fox News*?"

Rothenberg has not replied. The conclusion is clear: The UAW will do everything it can to prevent the WSWs from covering these public events.

This is nothing new. Although the WSWs and its predecessor publication in the United States, the *Bulletin* and *International Workers Bulletin* newspapers, covered UAW events for decades, since 2011 the UAW has banned the WSWs from all its press conferences.

At the same time, it has welcomed the corporate press, which perpetuates the myth that the UAW "represents" autoworkers and has repeatedly sided with the attack on the jobs and living standards of autoworkers. This is what the UAW means by "objective journalism standards."

In October 2011, a UAW official blocked WSWs reporter Shannon Jones from attending a press conference announcing a contract deal at the UAW-Ford National Program Center in downtown Detroit, saying the WSWs was not authorized to attend. This was just weeks after the WSWs questioned then UAW President Bob King during a September press conference announcing a deal at the UAW-GM Human Resource Center in Detroit.

After King claimed the deal was creating "middle class jobs," the WSWs noted that even with the small raise contained in the GM contract, second tier workers would be making barely enough to avoid qualifying for food stamps in Michigan. On the other hand, the

WSWS noted, the UAW has been disbursing \$90 million to its top staff, paying them \$150,000 or more. This exchange, which was reported the following day in the Detroit press, left King flustered and angry.

The WSWS was at the center of opposition during the 2015 contract fight and a voice for rank-and-file workers who defeated a UAW-backed national contract for the first time since 1986. This prompted the UAW and its New York City public relations firm Berlin Rosen to denounce the WSWS as “outside agitators” and accuse it of “fake news.”

The UAW was only able to push through a second deal at Fiat Chrysler, and similar sellouts at GM and Ford, by waging a campaign of intimidation, lies and outright vote-rigging. When WSWS reporters showed up to cover a hastily convened press conference in November 2015 at Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan, union officials physically removed them and snatched a cellphone from one of the reporters.

This thuggish behavior was caught on video, causing widespread disgust and condemnation from autoworkers. Shortly afterwards, the UAW announced that it miraculously received enough “yes” votes at the Dearborn facility for the national contract to pass by a razor-thin majority of 51-49 percent. Workers denounced the results as a fraud and accused the UAW of stuffing the ballots.

It wasn't the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* that was peddling “fake news,” but the UAW. Since 2015, four of the top UAW-FCA negotiators, including UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, have been convicted on federal charges for taking company bribes. The new UAW-FCA top negotiator, Cindy Estrada, is still under investigation for the bribery scheme. Past UAW presidents Bob King and Dennis Williams, along with current President Gary Jones, have been implicated in the corruption scandal.

After making nearly a decade of record profits, the companies want a sharp expansion in the number of low-paid contract workers and temps, far higher worker contributions for health care and other givebacks. With GM leading the way, the corporations hope to use the threat of plant closings and mass layoffs to blackmail workers into submission.

Autoworkers, however, are in no mood for extortion. They are threatening to disrupt the “Kabuki theatre” performance and fight to recoup decades of UAW-

backed concessions. There is growing support for the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter's* call for the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW.

UAW President Jones (salary \$260,243), Estrada (\$186,785) and the hundreds of other regional directors, “international servicing reps” and other functionaries, including press relations director Rothenberg (\$144,138) live in fear of such a rebellion. That is why they are doing everything to prevent workers from gaining access to the information, the collective voice and fighting socialist and internationalist program that only the WSWS and its *Autoworker Newsletter* provides them.

Autoworkers should reject the attempts by the UAW to cover-up their actions as they prepare another operation directed against workers. Subscribe, distribute and support the *Autoworker Newsletter* .

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter urges workers to join this Thursday's online meeting to discuss the building of rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the contract fight out of the hands of the UAW, prepare a national strike and unite American autoworkers with workers in Canada, Mexico and around the world in a common fight.



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