Strike votes continue as autoworkers gear up for contract fight against GM, Ford, and Chrysler

Our reporters
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Autoworkers at GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) are continuing to vote on strike authorization. Balloting will conclude Wednesday, and the official totals are expected the following day.

The balloting is taking place under conditions in which the United Auto Workers union (UAW) has been widely discredited by its role in forcing through sellout contracts over the past thirty years and because of the expanding corruption scandal, which has revealed that top union executives at FCA and GM took millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks in exchange for enforcing contracts favorable to the auto bosses.

While workers are determined to win back decades of concessions, the UAW has no intention of waging a genuine struggle. It is possible, however, that faced with overwhelming opposition from autoworkers, it may call isolated "Hollywood strikes" at one or two plants lasting days or even hours. Such a maneuver, which has been floated in the business press, would be to allow workers to blow off steam and ultimately facilitate a sellout.

Auto parts workers at Faurecia's facility in Saline, Michigan had a taste of this cynical tactic in June, when the local union called a strike at midnight and shut it down the following morning. The UAW forced through a concessions contract after making workers vote without being able to study the full contract.

Melvin, a former parts worker at Faurecia's plant in Saline, Michigan, recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* about how the union allowed the company to fire him. "I was terminated for having too many unexcused absences, but I believe that I was victimized. The company operates on an 8-point system—8 strikes and you're out. You have 3, or 4 personal excused absences per year, but that's a joke. They would not excuse me for a tardiness that I had because of a court appearance as well as a hospital visit. And the union did absolutely nothing."

Any "negotiations" between the companies and their paid agents in the UAW can only lead to further concessions. Therefore, the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on autoworkers to throw out the UAW bargaining committee and replace it with representatives elected from the rank and file. All bargaining sessions must be live streamed to prevent backroom dealings. This must be connected to the building of rank-and-file committees in every factory to take the struggle out of the hands of the UAW and mobilize the independent initiative of autoworkers across the US and internationally.

Autoworker Newsletter campaigners spoke to workers at FCA's Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) in suburban Detroit during a strike vote being held at the plant Thursday.

"We talk about [UAW corruption] every day. We had just talked about that at lunch time," Jason noted. "With all of the higher-ups getting charged and getting prosecuted, it's hard to trust a lot of people. We're the ones who get money taken away [from us]. We're the ones who are busting our butt to get nothing."

One younger worker stopped to speak to campaigners about the corruption of the UAW and the contract fight. "How can we stand up for ourselves and demand a better contract with these unions when they're taking bribes from the company?" he asked rhetorically. "And why aren't we talking about going on strike with workers in other countries? You know most of these auto parts they bring to the factory here come from

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Mexico. And they probably don’t have it any better than us over here.”

A campaigner for the *Autoworker Newsletter* explained that parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico had participated in a wildcat strike earlier this year. For weeks, the US media blacked out the strike, which began to shut down production in parts of the US due to a lack of parts. “Yeah, the media here didn’t want us to know about that because they don’t want us to go on strike together,” the worker remarked. “But we need to know about each other’s struggles.”

Autoworkers across the US have continued to speak out on the contract talks to the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

“Birds of a feather flock together,” an autoworker from Ford’s Louisville Assembly remarked. “I think they should postpone the contract until all the corrupt people are out. They have no right negotiating anything, especially [UAW-Chrysler vice president Cindy] Estrada.”

“Safety would be the number one concern [in the contract]. The heat index of around 100 degrees all summer long here in Louisville is a major concern. The union couldn’t care less. Two Gatorades, that’s it, and the same production rate is expected. My other concern is retirement. These clowns have no clue about negotiating. Almost half of workers are temps and in-progression, so no one is paying into our retirement.”

“There was a post on Facebook about how they just spent $4 million on Black Lake [the UAW’s private retreat center] because ‘it's not big enough to take care of Ford people, much less anyone else. It will only accommodate 395 people.’ That's why they ‘have’ to go Florida for their convention, or so they say … [and yet] with a [potential] strike coming, they’re telling us to save our money and stock up on canned goods … These lazy rats won’t do anything but for themselves.

“[The mass demonstrations] in Puerto Rico showed the best way to take a stand. The only bad part of striking is, can you trust the ones leading you?”

“The most important thing going on right now is the health care,” an autoworker at FCA’s Jefferson Assembly in Detroit said. “I heard that they want to increase the copay for the healthcare in the next contract. I am a diabetic, and my wife has serious health needs, so we need healthcare.”

“I don’t like CEOs making so much money. They just sit at a desk, while we're down here in the trenches. I'm getting beat down. But what can we do about it? We don't control what the company does with their money. And the UAW isn't going to do anything about it. If we wanted to try to change things, we'd have to have some kind of new organization, independent of the UAW and the company.”

When it was explained that this was precisely what the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* is fighting to build, he responded enthusiastically. “Let’s get it done!” he said.

“We always used to joke that they were on direct deposit from the company,” noted a worker from American Axle, which closed its Detroit factory in 2012 with the aid of the UAW. “We were more right than we thought we were fifteen years ago. We all knew they were crooked as hell.”

“Somebody was asking me how the UAW-GM talks are going because I’m always explaining what I’m reading in the *Autoworker Newsletter*. But the fact is the UAW is not saying a damn word.”

“The companies are trying to say they cannot give up anything in this contract because they have to invest a lot of money in Artificial Intelligence and autonomous vehicles. But they have been making record profits.”

“I agree with the *Newsletter* ,” he concluded. “We need a new strategy and we need to hook up with workers in other countries and in other industries.”

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