

Fearing rebellion of autoworkers against UAW, Trump holds White House meeting with General Motors CEO

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Little more than a week before the expiration of labor agreements covering 155,000 autoworkers at General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler, President Trump held a closed-door meeting Thursday afternoon with the CEO of GM.

Before the meeting, Reuters said that the central topics Trump and GM CEO Mary Barra would discuss were the upcoming contract for GM workers, the company's plans to close four US factories and the trade war with China.

The White House did not release any details of the discussion, and all Barra would tell reporters was that it was "productive and valuable."

The rare if not unprecedented White House meeting on the eve of the contract is a measure of the fear in ruling circles that autoworkers will rebel against the United Auto Workers and spark a broader movement of opposition by the working class.

The UAW has not called a major national strike since the Ford walkout in 1976. It has played a critical role in suppressing the class struggle and facilitating a vast transfer of wealth to America's corporate and financial elite over the last four decades.

The pent-up anger against the UAW has reached a boiling point after revelations that its top executives were paid millions in bribes to sign pro-company contracts, which cost autoworkers tens of thousands of dollars apiece in lost wages and benefits.

As the 96 percent strike authorization vote has shown, autoworkers are determined to recoup years of UAW-backed concessions. In particular, tens of thousands of younger workers hired after the 2008–09 financial crash want to abolish poverty level "second-tier" wages, win full medical coverage and put an end

to temporary, part-time and contract employment.

The present situation is "unchartered territory," *Detroit News* columnist Daniel Howes warned Wednesday. "Two of three Detroit automakers are a decade removed from federally induced bankruptcy; profitable companies are looking to lower labor costs even as hourly workers demand base-pay raises and continuation of world-class private health care; federal filings and reporting by *The Detroit News* show recent and sitting union leadership used training funds and member dues money to finance lavish perks like long vacations and building a posh lakefront home for a retired union president."

Expressing the apprehension of the ruling class over what will happen next, Howe adds, "It's in this confused context that UAW and GM bargainers are charged with delivering a tentative agreement that a majority of the automaker's 46,000 hourly workers would ratify. Good luck with that: the stench of corruption, suspicion and mistrust will hang over whatever the two sides produce, and no one should be surprised if union members use ratification to register their disgust and vote no."

The ongoing "negotiations" are a complete fraud. The hand-picked UAW bargaining committees are totally illegitimate. The guilty plea Wednesday by top UAW official Michael Grimes, who confessed to taking nearly \$2 million in kickbacks and bribes, and the FBI raids of the homes of the current and former UAW president have now implicated top officials who negotiated the 2011 and 2015 GM contracts.

Six of the top eight UAW negotiators who signed the 2015 Fiat Chrysler deal have already been convicted or implicated in the corruption scandal.

This makes it all the more imperative that autoworkers form rank-and-file factory committees in every plant to take the conduct of the negotiations and the contract fight out of the hands of the corrupt UAW. A network of rank-and-file committees must be established to communicate and coordinate a real fight against the auto companies and both corporate-controlled parties.

A veteran worker told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, “A hundred and fifty thousand people have given until they can’t give anymore... Believe me when we say we’re suffering. They [UAW officials] were not, and we continue to suffer because of their mistakes. I’m sure they will still be living better than any of us. Thank you, UAW.”

Referring to the UAW, a Toledo, Ohio, Jeep worker said, “When you have a problem, we are always told their hands are tied or it’s up to the company! They *never* stand up for the regular worker unless it’s one of their friends.”

The wife of another autoworker, referring to Grimes, said, “It’s hilarious that the day this man pleads guilty my husband in mandated to work Sunday, his only day off. Which means they have to work two weeks straight with *no* days off. Oh, and it’s two weeks before the potential strike. How ironic. The whole system is screwed up and I have had it with the nonsense!”

Fearful that a rebellion by autoworkers will take a more politically conscious form, Rory Gamble, vice president and director of the UAW National Ford Department, issued a letter to Ford workers Thursday warning about the dangers of “outside influences” on social media.

“Many entities against us are attempting to skew perception,” Gamble wrote. “I ask that you be cautious of the sources from which you receive your information and the material you choose to share. It is imperative that we are not misguided about these negotiations by rumors, misinformation or outside influences. Again, unity is our strength.”

The UAW is terrified of the influence of the *World Socialist Web Site* and its *Autoworker Newsletter*, which was at the center of autoworkers’ opposition during the 2015 contract fight. In opposition to the lies and deceptions of the UAW, the *Newsletter* has provided autoworkers the information they need, a voice to express their demands, and the means to

organize independently of the UAW.

If workers don’t have their own organizations, the UAW, the Trump administration and the Democrats will maneuver to impose even deeper concessions. This could take the form of dragging out the process well beyond the contract expiration or the launching of a partial strike followed by a supposed “plant-saving” deal. Any such deal would contain huge concessions, including health care cuts and a sharp expansion of the number of temporary and contract workers.

It could also take the form of a direct intervention of the Trump administration to block a strike citing “national security concerns” or using the corruption investigation to engineer a takeover of the UAW, imposing binding arbitration and another pro-company deal.

The UAW-corporate conspiracy can only be countered by the formation of rank-and-file committees, armed with a political strategy, based on the fight to unify all auto and auto parts workers, in the US and internationally. Any intervention by the Trump administration would lead to a direct political clash between the working class and both big business parties, which defend the capitalist profit system.

Everything now depends on the independent initiative of rank-and-file autoworkers and the development of a powerful industrial and political counteroffensive by the whole working class.



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