

Trump administration intervenes in bid to shut down GM strike

Tom Hall
18 September 2019

The Trump administration is engaged in secret talks to shut down the strike at General Motors, *Politico* reported Tuesday afternoon.

According to anonymous sources who spoke with the media outlet, National Economic Council Director Larry Kudlow and White House trade and manufacturing adviser Peter Navarro are both involved in the talks.

The terms of the proposed deal to end the strike, according to the sources, involve the re-opening of the Lordstown Assembly plant in northeastern Ohio, which was shuttered by GM this March.

The White House, General Motors and the UAW quickly released official denials of the *Politico* report. However, given the dangers to the American ruling class posed by the strike, as well as the fact that *Politico* received confirmation for its story from multiple sources, these denials cannot be considered credible.

Autoworkers must be warned: the intervention by the Trump administration is not in their interests. All of the demands of autoworkers, including the elimination of the tier system and the converting of temps to full-time positions, improved wages, health care and pensions, and the reversal of all layoffs, will be swept aside on the basis of lying promises about “saving American jobs.”

The United Auto Workers will seek to use a government-brokered agreement to provide a cover for its betrayal of the strike, which it sought unsuccessfully to avoid and is working to shut down at the earliest possible opportunity.

While details of the federal proposal are still scant, the fact that it involves re-opening the Lordstown plant indicates that it is along the lines of GM’s latest contract proposal, which ties promises to eventually re-open one of the plants it has targeted for closure to massive increases in out-of-pocket health care expenses, a major expansion of temporary workers and other concessions.

It is also possible that a Trump-brokered deal would involve the closure of plants in Mexico and relocation of

their products to Lordstown. Trump responded to GM’s announcement last year that it would close four plants in the United States with a torrent of nationalism, demanding that the auto giant shutter factories in Mexico and shift production to the US.

Trump reiterated this in comments yesterday threatening the strike with federal mediation when he declared, “We don’t want General Motors building plants outside of this country.”

Such a move would be aimed at pitting US workers against their brothers and sisters in Mexico under conditions where workers on both sides of the border are expressing support for a united struggle. The unification of autoworkers across borders is anathema to the global auto giants and the US ruling class, who operate on the principle of “divide and rule.”

The reported involvement of Navarro, the chief architect of Trump’s trade war policies and rabid anti-China fanatic, is highly significant. It was Navarro, together with Trump’s fascistic then-chief advisor Stephen Bannon, who had drafted an executive order, ultimately never signed, which would have withdrawn the United States from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

If Navarro is indeed involved in the talks, at least one of his functions is likely to serve as emissary to the UAW from Trump. Navarro enjoys the support of broad sections of the trade union bureaucracy for his protectionist policies. They are also well-versed in xenophobic incitement against foreign workers.

When he was named Director of the National Trade Council in December 2016, shortly before Trump took office, the move was hailed by various trade union figures. “[Navarro] has raised some important critiques of American trade policy and we look forward to working with him to translate that into real policies that benefit America’s workers,” AFL-CIO communications director

Josh Goldstein told liberal magazine *Mother Jones*.

United Steelworkers president Leo Gerard, who oversaw the destruction of steelworkers' jobs and wages and sold out a strike by refinery workers in 2015, hailed the creation of the Council, calling it a move to end trade policies that "undermined domestic production" and a recognition of manufacturing's importance "to our nation's economy and security."

The UAW has also appealed to the Trump administration to declare electric and self-driving technologies as a "strategic sector to be protected and built in the US" and to create a "new industrial policy to beat back China, which dominates the global production of lithium-ion batteries.

The unions completely endorse the statements by Trump administration officials who say manufacturing should be considered a "national security" issue. Trump ordered a "national security" probe into the auto industry last year and has considered imposing 25 percent tariffs on auto imports on these grounds.

This not only reflects the real danger that a trade war could rapidly escalate into military conflict, it also creates a pseudo-legal framework for placing key industries, such as the auto industry, under government authority and banning strikes, as they were during World War II.

The growing sentiment for a joint international struggle by all autoworkers has been expressed both by the refusal of GM workers in Silao, Mexico, to accept increases in production during the strike and in the comments of American workers to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

"If they go global, so should we," one Fiat Chrysler worker at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant said, after praising the heroic stand of the Mexican GM workers. Another worker said she supports the striking GM workers "100% as do my colleagues" and "I agree that we should support our brothers and sisters globally. Fight fire with fire!"

The intervention of the Trump administration takes place as sentiment for an industry-wide strike grows among Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers. Workers are in no mood to be taken in again by "job saving" claims by the president, the UAW or the Democrats, which amount to nothing but are conditioned on new, even more sweeping concessions.

"All of us should be on strike together!" said a Ford worker from the Flat Rock Assembly Plant, just west of Detroit. "GM workers are out there fighting for us all; we should be out there with our union brothers and sisters."

'Why didn't we all strike when GM struck?' a Fiat

Chrysler worker at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant asked. "The unions says we are waiting to see what GM does, but what difference does it make? Last time, GM didn't take away the pensions, but Chrysler did!"

"So why are working when the GM workers are out? That only helps the Big Three, it's not helping us. If one strikes, we should all strike.

"The UAW is so sneaky and conniving, they've got us divided. All the years of contracts [negotiated by the UAW] should be voided and we should get back all they took. I see nothing but corruption.

"This offer is awful—they want to increase our deductibles and co-pays on medical, it's already too high. Prescriptions are high. My body is breaking down already, after two years. I'm in my mid-40s and too old to be working this hard for \$17 an hour."

The UAW is not "bargaining" on behalf of workers but conspiring with the corporations and the Trump administration to beat back the resistance of workers and impose the dictates of big business. Trump's Justice Department is also hanging the prospect of government receivership and long prison sentences over the heads of UAW officials as extra incentive for them to demonstrate their "good behavior" and sabotage the strike.

Victory in the strike is possible, but only if the autoworkers take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the corrupt UAW through the election of rank-and-file strike committees in every factory. These committees should reach out to workers at Ford, Fiat Chrysler and throughout the rest of the auto and auto parts industry to carry out a common struggle. At the same time, US autoworkers must reject the nationalist poison spewed by the unions, Trump and the Democrats and unite with workers in Canada, Mexico and around the world to conduct a joint struggle against the attack on jobs and living standards by the global corporations.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact