The GM strike is in danger

Marcus Day
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As the strike by over 49,000 General Motors autoworkers in the US enters the second week, a warning must be made: the strike is in danger of defeat at the hands of the United Auto Workers bribe-takers.

The GM strike has drawn the support and sympathy not only of workers at Ford, Fiat Chrysler and in other industries, but also in other countries—Mexico, Canada, Brazil, and elsewhere—where workers are looking to fight back against the profit-driven attacks of the corporations.

But the UAW does not have a strategy to win the strike; it has a strategy to lose it. The strike can be won, but only if it is taken out of the hands of the corrupt UAW bureaucracy, who hope to isolate and starve out GM workers.

There is no time to lose. To prevent the strike's defeat, workers must immediately form rank-and-file factory committees to take control of their struggle. Adequate resources and support must be mobilized! Strike pay must be raised to $750 a week, the walkout must be expanded to include workers at Ford and Fiat Chrysler, and an urgent appeal must be issued for the support of workers in other industries and other countries.

The UAW is working out of a playbook used by the union bureaucracy throughout the 1980s and '90s: isolate workers in their struggles, refuse to mobilize the full strength of the working class, wait until workers are starved out, and force through concessions. They've done it countless times before, and they're preparing to do it again.

Throughout the entire stage-managed contract "negotiations" at GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler, the UAW has kept its membership in the dark, hiding its real aims. The UAW has issued no list of concrete demands, because it never drafted any.

The UAW received its marching orders from auto executives long ago: more temporary workers, worse working conditions, lower wages, and higher out-of-pocket health care costs. What are referred to as "contract negotiations" have in fact been backroom strategy sessions between union and company officials to work out the most effective way to ram through these new attacks.

GM is dead set on lowering its labor costs, and the UAW knows it. More than just GM's profit margin is on the line: The framework set in the upcoming contract would serve as a new baseline for the exploitation of workers not just at Ford and Fiat Chrysler, but throughout the auto and other manufacturing industries more broadly, with implications for the entire global capitalist economic system.

Behind GM, those who hold their purse strings on Wall Street have made clear they will accept no concessions to workers.

The conspiracy of the UAW and the companies, however, has been upended by the escalating corruption scandal, which has revealed that the UAW is a criminal gang, bought and paid for by management.

Less than a month ago, the FBI raided the homes of the current UAW president, Gary Jones, and his predecessor, Dennis Williams, along with other UAW locations. Meanwhile, a growing number of high-level union officials have been locked up or indicted for using illicit funds to bankroll high-end lifestyles. The latest, Jeffery Pietrzyk, is a former co-director of the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources, who was charged last Friday.

UAW President Jones and UAW Region 5 Director Vance Pearson have largely spent their time in recent weeks talking with their attorneys and the Justice Department, primarily "negotiating" the length of their potential jail terms.

Feeling no choice but to call a strike last Sunday, the UAW is now starving striking workers on only $250 a week in strike pay, which will only be distributed beginning on the 15th day of the strike. This miserable amount is aimed at creating economic pressure on workers to accept the company's terms, while ensuring that as little as possible is depleted from the UAW's $750 million "strike fund," which the executives use as their slush fund.

In the clearest and most damning indication that it is planning to sabotage the struggle, the UAW has

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stonewalled demands by autoworkers for an all-out strike against the auto industry, keeping its 100,000-plus members at Ford and Fiat Chrysler on the job.

Many autoworkers know the UAW is plotting a betrayal. To prevent this and win the struggle, the following is essential:

1. The conduct of the strike must be taken out of the hands of the UAW through the formation of rank-and-file factory committees. Workers must hold meetings outside the view of the UAW and management, elect representatives from the most militant and trusted workers, and assemble to formulate their own demands, including:

- The abolition of the multi-tier system
- An immediate wage hike of 40 percent and restoration of cost-of-living pay (COLA)
- The conversion of all temporary and part-time workers to full-time
- The reopening of Lordstown and other closed plants and the immediate rehiring of all laid-off workers
- Fully paid-for health care and pensions

2. The strike must be immediately expanded to include Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers. As an autoworker at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, "Everyone here is asking, 'Why aren't we all out together!?'"

An appeal must be made for support from the entire working class: at auto parts and supplier plants, in the shipping, logistics and steel industries, and beyond.

3. The struggle must be linked up and coordinated internationally. Workers cannot fight and beat one of the largest transnational corporations on the planet on a national basis. GM workers must appeal to their real allies: the millions and billions of workers around the world who are coming into struggle and looking to fight against poverty and exploitation.

The GM strike is part of a global upsurge of working-class struggle. This year began with a wave of wildcat strikes by 70,000 auto parts and other workers in the *maquiladora* sweatshops in Matamoros, Mexico, who marched to the border and appealed for their class brothers and sisters in the US to join them.

Now, autoworkers in Mexico are supporting the strike of GM workers, with GM workers in Silao courageously organizing to oppose the attempts by the company to speed up production, risking their jobs and even lives. In online meetings held by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* over the last two weeks, hundreds of workers from a number of countries participated—the US, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil—calling for solidarity and collaboration.

4. Workers must adopt a strategy that opposes their interests to those of the capitalist class. Autoworkers are engaged not just in a strike against GM, but in a political struggle. Representing the auto industry and Wall Street stands the capitalist state and two big business parties, from the Republican Donald Trump to the Democratic Party and all its presidential candidates.

The Trump administration is in close discussions with GM on finding a way to end the strike and push through a further restructuring of the auto industry, following on the Obama administration's oversight of the 2009 bankruptcy, which set the terms of the abominable conditions workers now face.

Joseph Biden, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders are grandstanding and falsely professing their support for autoworkers at rallies this weekend and in the coming days. But if they think it becomes necessary, both the Democrats and Republicans are prepared to mobilize the police—as has already happened, most notably at GM's Springhill, Tennessee, plant—or eventually the National Guard or other armed forces against striking workers.

To oppose this, a mass political movement and party of the working class must be built, independent of the capitalist parties.

If workers' livelihoods and interests are to be secured, the auto industry must be reorganized as a public utility and placed under workers' democratic control, as part of the fight for socialism, i.e., the running of society to meet human need, not the insatiable profit interests of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

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