

Labor Notes, DSA line up with UAW bureaucrats against GM strikers

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The eruption of the GM strike in the midst of a corruption scandal that has engulfed United Auto Workers President Gary Jones has sent the groups that orbit the Democratic Party and populate the trade union bureaucracy rushing to prop up the UAW and block an independent movement and expansion of the strike by the workers.

What little has been written on the strike—the first major auto strike in the US in more than 40 years—by groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and publications such as *Labor Notes* and *Jacobin* has been filled with sophistries aimed at opposing the struggle of workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW.

The DSA, which is closely allied to *Labor Notes*, is a faction of the Democratic Party. Around *Labor Notes* are grouped mid- and lower-level union officials. They occasionally spout socialist phrases but long ago repudiated the struggle for socialism. They defend the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade union apparatus to which they themselves are wedded.

Labor Notes includes the Autoworker Caravan, a dissident faction of the UAW bureaucracy that demands that workers accept the authority of the UAW while mounting token protests against its corporatist policies. Autoworker Caravan includes Frank Hammer, former president of UAW Local 909 at GM's now-closed Warren Transmission plant, and Wendy Thompson, former president of UAW Local 235 in Detroit. It was established during the 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler to encourage illusions in the Obama administration, which, with the support of the UAW, imposed a 50 percent wage cut on all new-hires, eliminated overtime after eight hours and carried through more plant closings and layoffs.

An example of the defense by these forces of the UAW bureaucracy is an article posted September 16 on the *Jacobin* website by Jane Slaughter, a former editor of *Labor Notes* and now a member of the DSA. Intent on convincing GM workers that they are weak, she argues that the exposure of bribe-taking and the wholesale theft of workers' dues payments by the union executives has left the workers "between a rock and a hard place."

Why the exposure of the corruption and criminality of the UAW weakens the workers, she does not explain. How can the exposure of the truth—the fact that the interests of the UAW are

diametrically opposed to those of autoworkers and therefore workers will have to take the conduct of this strike into their own hands—weaken the workers?

Slaughter and company are weakened, not the workers. The complete discrediting of the already despised bureaucrats makes it that much more difficult for them to carry out their assigned task of defending the union apparatus against the workers.

Slaughter asserts that the workers can do nothing to fight GM and prevent the UAW from engineering yet another betrayal except to "vote no" on the sellout contract the union will inevitably produce.

This is a recipe for the defeat of the strike, as Slaughter well knows. She demands that the workers passively allow the union tops to isolate the strike, starve the strikers with a miserable \$250 a week in strike pay, keep the rank and file in the dark and handcuff them from stopping GM strikebreaking. Then, when the sellout comes down, the workers "will have just one tool... their right to vote no."

She then flat out lies in an attempt to demonstrate that this is an effective strategy, citing as supposed proof the 2015 contract. "They [the workers] can do what Chrysler did in 2015," she writes. "[T]hey organized to turn down a contract that enshrined the two-tier system." She claims falsely—as every autoworker knows—that the contracts that were ultimately rammed through by the UAW represented a "partial victory."

Workers, despite their militancy and determination, lacked independent rank-and-file factory committees to take the struggle forward against the UAW. As a result, the UAW was able to ram through pro-company deals that maintained the two-tier system and vastly expanded the use of poverty-wage, part-time and temporary workers.

Slaughter actually attempts to argue that the exposure of the UAW will make it more amenable to addressing the workers' demands. She quotes approvingly a worker at the Romulus Engine plant near Detroit, who says, "With everything that's going on, maybe they'll try to gain our respect back; hopefully that's the plan."

The opposite is the case. The union apparatus will be all the more determined to impose the agenda of GM and Wall Street on the workers in the hope of securing a better plea bargain

with less prison time from federal prosecutors and avoiding a government takeover of the UAW.

Slaughter leaves her central argument to DSA member Sean Crawford, who says: “Yes, the UAW is corrupt. It’s disgusting beyond belief. But this is not about them. It’s about us. We can and will clean house. But we have a more immediate fight on our hands right now.”

This argument—that now is not the time to fight the bureaucracy because we have to fight GM—is based on two related falsehoods.

First is the bogus claim that the UAW and its leadership are susceptible to pressure from the rank and file and can be pushed to act in the interests of the workers.

This is belied by the past four decades, which have seen an unending series of concessions imposed on the workers by the companies, working hand-in-glove with the UAW. The primary function of the UAW during the period beginning with the Chrysler bailout of 1979 has been to suppress the opposition of the workers.

The UAW has adopted the corporatist policy of union-management collaboration, embodied in the myriad joint structures, such as the union-company “training centers,” which serve as slush funds for the union operatives. It has transformed itself into a business that enriches its executives by serving as a cheap labor contractor and industrial police force for the companies.

The assets of the UAW apparatus have swelled while the workers have suffered huge losses. The outcome of this process is the odious corruption of the entire apparatus.

The UAW has deeply rooted material interests in ensuring the defeat of the GM strike and imposition of the company’s demands for health care cuts and an expansion of part-time and temporary labor. That is why it is isolating the GM workers, paying starvation strike pay of \$250 a week (out of a \$760 million strike fund) and ordering workers not to oppose company strikebreaking.

The last thing it wants is a successful strike that will encourage a growth of militancy more broadly in the working class. That threatens its entire business model.

The second, related lie is that the GM workers can win a decent contract simply by carrying out an isolated strike and then voting down any sellout deal brought back by the UAW leadership.

Aside from the fact that the union will stuff ballots and falsify votes to push through a pro-company settlement, as Ford workers are convinced it did in 2015, the line of the DSA and Labor Notes conceals the real nature of the struggle. It is a fight not only against a highly profitable global corporation, but a battle against the entire capitalist class and its state.

The biggest fear of the ruling class is that the strike will spiral out of the control of the UAW and become a broader struggle of autoworkers and the working class as a whole against the capitalist system—in other words, that it will become a political

class movement.

Wall Street is calling the shots, not GM chief executive Mary Barra. If GM failed to impose sweeping new attacks on workers, Wall Street would retaliate by crashing GM stock and lowering its credit rating to junk bond status.

Moreover, GM is part of a global auto industry involving a system of production spanning continents and oceans. During the last major GM strike, in 1970, the vast bulk of union workers at the company resided in the US. Today, only 35 percent of GM workers are located in the United States.

That is why the entire Big Three workforce must be called out and the active support mobilized of Canadian and Mexican workers and autoworkers around the world. All sections of the working class in the US—teachers, Amazon workers, working class youth, the unemployed, retirees—must be brought into the fight.

This requires that workers organize independently and in opposition to the entire UAW apparatus and its pseudo-left defenders through the formation of a network of rank-and-file factory committees democratically controlled by workers. Freed of the weight of the union apparatus, workers would be in a position to advance demands that correspond to their needs, not what the companies claim they can afford. These would include a major wage increase to make up for decades of declining wages, an end to multi-tier labor, full health coverage, workers’ control over line speed, the enforcement of an eight-hour day, and an end to unsafe working conditions.

Through the committees, they would be able to make contact with and coordinate action with workers at other plants and companies, including parts workers and salaried employees. They could inform themselves of the maneuvers of the company and the union all over the country. They could organize joint action to defend picket lines.

They could fight for the political independence of the working class from the ruling class, its politicians and parties, and its servants in the union apparatus. On this basis, they could forge their unity with workers internationally in the struggle against the source of oppression and exploitation, capitalism.

The alternative is betrayal and defeat at the hands of the UAW. The DSA and *Labor Notes* are intervening to prevent a successful struggle and help the bureaucracy defeat the strike. They are on the other side of the class barricades.



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