General Motors presses demands as UAW leaves workers in the dark, isolates strike

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As the strike by General Motors workers in the US continues into its third week, the automaker is pressing its demand for a contract that includes a derisory pay increase of two percent, higher health co-pays and the expansion of low-paid temporary and contract workers.

On Tuesday, the United Auto Workers claimed it had rejected a "comprehensive proposal" from GM, but it offered few details. UAW Vice President Terry Dittes said in the text of a perfunctory letter posted on the UAW website that the offer had "come up short" on issues such as health care, wages, temporary employees, skilled trades and job security. He said the UAW had submitted a counterproposal to management, without specifying its terms.

The UAW is continuing its news blackout on the actual content of "negotiations," which are in fact a charade. The UAW has not issued a list of demands nor has it provided strike updates.

This is because the UAW is not really negotiating anything. It is engaged in a waiting game along with the company to try to isolate and wear down workers and impose a concessions contract.

The strike is having a broad impact. J. P. Morgan estimates that it has cost GM some $1 billion in lost production to date. It was reported Tuesday that GM had idled its plant in Silao, Mexico, which builds the bestselling Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra 1500 pickups, impacting 6,000 workers.

On Tuesday, GM fired another worker at its Silao plant after he refused to accept a severance package. Negrete de Alvarado had been part of a group of workers who had organized opposition to the pro-management official union in the plant. They had mobilized workers in support of the strike by US GM workers and became targets for management retaliation.

To date, at least eight workers at the Silao plant have been victimized by GM management for their courageous stand.

According to NBC News, the strike has now also resulted in the layoff of 10,000 non-UAW workers in North America, including 3,200 in Canada, where GM has shut down the Oshawa, Ontario assembly plant.

Despite GM's economic losses, Wall Street is demanding that management hold fast on its demands for significant cuts. One analyst quoted by the *Detroit Free Press* suggested that GM would save $500 million a year if it can impose the cuts in health care and other concessions that it is seeking. These cuts would set a precedent for the other auto companies and other employers across North America.

A 20-year veteran worker at the GM Toledo Transmission plant told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, "No one wants to be working as cheap labor. I am looking to the future, especially for the temporary workers. They treat them like crap and keep them as temps forever. I don't think it's asking too much to treat them right. With all the billions that GM is making, they should be able to pay us."

Danielle, a worker at the GM Chicago Parts Distribution Center in Bolingbrook, Illinois, said, "The union hasn't told us anything. Our union rep was just here an hour ago. I asked them if they heard anything about the negotiations, what was going on. They said they didn't know.

"They divide up the labor force with the tiers—there's legacy and in-progression. I'm in-progression, which means I don't get a pension, and I don't get vacation benefits. What I really care about is getting healthcare. I think we make pretty good wages, but what I really need is the healthcare. And with this job we need it, especially because we work so hard every day after our

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shifts, we go home with our bodies completely aching.

"The company wants us to work 14-hour shifts. We don't want to do that. They treat you like you are completely replaceable. They don't care if you die on the job. They think they can just replace you with someone else.

"What I want people to come to realize is that this strike is not just us being out here for ourselves. You have to think about everyone and all of the other people you work with and the future generations too when you decide to come out here on the picket."

Many workers expressed anger over the information blackout being imposed by the UAW. Many felt that the revelation of massive corruption of the UAW leadership made the entire negotiation process suspect if not downright illegitimate.

Another worker at the Bolingbrook parts center said, "The UAW is working for the corporation and not for us.

"There is so much corruption on both sides, and we are stuck in the middle. We don't trust the union leadership. We are the ones being stepped on in this building. No one has answers for us.

"Everybody in this plant is divided... These people [UAW] are snitches. They go tell management everything that's being said on the floor. You don't know who to trust."

Workers at Ford and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) are following the struggle at GM very closely. Many have shown their support by joining GM workers on the picket lines.

A temporary part-time worker (TPT) at the FCA Toledo North Assembly Plant said about the news blackout, "They are not saying anything. We are in the dark. We are the last to be informed."

She added, "We call them the crooks," referring to the indictments of top UAW officials on taking bribes from management to fix contracts. "They were all embezzling. All of them are under investigation. It's crazy.

"Buying $10,000 fountain pens. That's a slap in the face. They are handling a lot of money, and there is no one there to oversee it."

Remarking on the $250 weekly strike pay checks the UAW has been doling out she said, "You can work at McDonald's for more than that.

"The UAW does whatever the company says. They are pushing us to work overtime, 60-70 hours a week. They already told us they have a 60-day supply of vehicles.

She commented on the treatment of TPT workers. "I have heard horror stories. We have no choice; we have to work Sundays. They can fire you at will for anything; having a cell phone, wearing ear buds, not having your safety glasses."

She added that to add insult to injury, "Once you get hired full-time you have to go down in pay. I have a coworker who has been a TPT now for 5 years. She is now up to $23 an hour, but if she went to full-time, she would drop to $15."

A second-tier worker from the FCA Jefferson North Assembly in Detroit said, "Dealing with the UAW feels like we're working for the Mafia. We pay all these dues, and they (the union executives) are pocketing it.

"They would have taken us all out [on strike] if they really represented us." Instead, "They extended our contract, they extended the Ford contract. There is no reason for us [FCA and Ford] to be working while our brothers and sisters are on strike. The GM workers don't even know what they're striking for."

A Ford retiree in Ohio told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, "They shouldn't even be negotiating using the UAW's crooks still at the table. There should be a clean slate; start over. I was always told the UAW isn't allowed to represent retirees, which is why we haven't had a rate increase. Don't get me started.

"Another way to keep costs down is to forget us [retirees]. I get $1,550 a month after they subtract Social Security, BS!!"

A worker at Chicago Ford Stamping said, "They should get everything they [GM workers] are asking for. But I haven't heard anything from the UAW. We are in here losing our legs. Our bodies are getting beat up. I'm wearing a brace on right now." He said his left leg had been injured. "It's hard to go up the stairs and hard to go down the stairs. And I'm not the only one either."

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