GM strike at the crossroads

UAW preparing sell-out contract as workers fight to expand the struggle

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The strike by General Motors workers is at a critical juncture. If the conduct of the struggle is left in the hands of the corrupt United Auto Workers, it will be defeated. The alternative is for rank-and-file workers to seize the initiative, form independent factory committees, extend the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler and mobilize the entire working class.

The strike, about to enter its 19th day, has hit GM's operations hard, closing its factories and supplier plants across the US, Canada and Mexico. The company has lost an estimated $1 billion in third quarter profits.

However, GM has a massive cash surplus due to record profits from UAW-backed concessions. Wall Street is bankrolling GM and insisting it defeat the strike no matter what the short-term losses. If GM attains its aims—more than tripling the percentage of temps and sharply increasing health care costs—that would cut $5 an hour in labor costs, or half a billion dollars a year.

Wall Street has an even longer-term strategy. Its aim is to break the resistance of workers to a further transformation of working conditions in every section of the economy, wiping out whatever remains of job security, annual pay increases, health care and pensions. The future under capitalism for the working class will poverty pay and temp jobs.

The UAW does not have a strategy for victory. It has a strategy for defeat. It is operating as the junior partner of GM and Wall Street.

The UAW executives have kept workers in the dark. They have ordered 100,000-plus Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers to remain on the job, stockpiling vehicles that these companies would use in the event of a strike.

Far from providing workers with the financial resources needed to sustain a struggle, the UAW has put strikers on starvation rations of $250 a week in strike pay, although it sits on a strike fund worth more than $800 million.

UAW Vice President Terry Dittes sent out a letter Tuesday claiming the UAW had rejected a GM contract proposal and had issued a counterproposal. While admitting that GM had not moved an inch on its demands, Dittes gave absolutely no details on what the UAW was supposedly demanding.

Yesterday, Rory Gamble, UAW vice president for Ford, released a letter saying that "progress" was being made. In an attempt to justify the fact that he gave no details, Gamble wrote: "Please understand that negotiations are very fluid and [are] constantly in the state of flux. Therefore, we are unable during the negotiation process to disclose items being negotiated in detail."

The UAW does not want to "disclose items being negotiated" because nothing is being negotiated. The UAW has already agreed to massive cuts. It is just trying to figure out a way to force them through. It knows if workers were informed about what is happening, they would revolt.

The UAW has spent the last four decades imposing the dictates of the corporations, including two-tier wages and the spread of temporary workers. In return, the auto companies have funneled billions of dollars in bribes through the joint training centers, while UAW executives pilfered the strike fund and union dues.

The *Detroit News* reported Wednesday night that UAW Secretary/Treasurer Gary Casteel and Danny Trull, former deputy to UAW President Gary Jones, are cooperating with federal investigators, providing

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information on over $1 million allegedly spent on luxuries for UAW officials. The allegations directly implicate Jones, who continues to collect his full salary of $230,000 a year, or $5,000 a week.

Trull told investigators that he witnessed Jones spend UAW dues on golf clothing in Palm Springs. Money was also spent on high-end retreats, cigars, liquor and other luxuries. Trull, who also served on the board of Jones' charity, was allegedly ordered to hide the expenses.

If the UAW officials are negotiating anything, it is the length of their prison terms. They know they will be rewarded for good behavior, in this case if they can shut down the strike and force workers to swallow GM's demands.

There is widespread and growing support among autoworkers for a united fight. The call by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* for the formation of independent organizations of struggle, rank-and-file strike committees, has been met with a powerful response. If there is any organization that has been completely discredited in the eyes of workers, it is the UAW.

This understanding must be turned into action. Workers must take the initiative by forming these committees, holding meetings in their factories, independent of the UAW, to discuss and implement a strategy to win this strike.

These committees should demand: 1. Abolish the two-tier system; 2. A 40 percent pay raise; 3. The conversion all temps into full-time workers with full pay and benefits; 4. Restore COLA and all the benefits retirees have lost; 5. Reopen all closed factories, rehire the laid off workers; 6. Reinstate the brave GM workers at the Silao factory who have been fired for refusing to act as strikebreakers against their US brothers and sisters.

The heroic example of the Mexican workers at GM's Silao factory demonstrates that workers around the world are striving to unite in a common struggle. It is the class duty of US workers to come to the aid of the nine Silao GM workers who have been victimized for standing up for their co-workers north of the border.

To show GM and Wall Street that workers mean business, rank-and-file committees should call for the tripling of strike pay to $750 a week, the expansion of the strike to Ford, Fiat Chrysler and throughout the auto and auto parts industry.

Mass demonstrations should be organized to unite autoworkers with every other section of workers and young people and transform this strike into a powerful social movement against capitalist exploitation and social inequality.

The outcome of this fight depends on the initiative of rank and file workers. The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* will do everything we can to provide workers with the truth, assist in building rank-and-file committees and establish lines of communication across factories, industries and countries to wage a counter-offensive of the entire working class.

For assistance in carrying out this struggle, contact the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter at wsws.org/auto.

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