

As strike enters fourth week, UAW says talks with GM have “taken turn for the worse”

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After reporting for days that “good progress” was being made in talks with General Motors, the United Auto Workers suddenly reversed itself Sunday morning, declaring that “negotiations have taken a turn for the worse.”

The statement from UAW Vice President Terry Dittes comes as the strike by 48,000 GM workers enters its fourth week.

In a letter to autoworkers, Dittes, who heads the UAW’s GM Department, said the bargaining committee and UAW International Staff had given the company an “extensive package proposal” Saturday evening, which addressed “wages, signing bonus, job security, pensions, skilled trades, profit sharing, transfer rights.”

GM’s response Sunday morning, Dittes wrote, “did not address our extensive package,” and “reverted back to their last rejected proposal and made little change.” He went on to say that the company’s proposal “did nothing to provide job security during the term of the Agreement” or other concerns.

Declaring that the UAW “cannot be more disappointed,” Dittes wrote that the UAW “will continue to negotiate on behalf of you, your families and all workers in our country.”

In an email to Scott Sandefur, Vice President of GM North America Labor Relations, Dittes was even more groveling towards the company, complaining that GM negotiators “didn’t even have a professional courtesy to explain why you could not accept or why you rejected our package proposal,” and saying that the “law and basic decency require no less.”

While the UAW claims that GM has “reverted back to its rejected proposal,” in fact the company has never budged from its demands for half a billion annual labor savings. It has only left it up to the UAW to figure out

how to package and sell the concessions to workers.

The only laws GM is operating by are the laws of the capitalist profit system and the demands by its Wall Street backers. The powerful financial interests behind GM have made clear that the company must absorb the short-term losses of a strike, even if it is prolonged, in order to achieve vast cost savings and attain its strategic aims.

This means defeating the strike, gutting workers’ health care benefits, and tripling the percentage of temps so GM can have the type of “flexible manufacturing workforce” needed for the highly competitive struggle to dominate the electric and self-driving markets of the future.

The response of GM is further proof that the UAW does not have a strategy to win the strike. It has a strategy to defeat it.

Autoworkers must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the corrupt UAW. This requires the organization of rank-and-file strike and factory committees, independent of the UAW and committed to fight for the demands workers and their families need not, the profits of the giant corporations and Wall Street.

The isolation of the GM strike must be broken, and the struggle escalated. This means bringing out the 100,000-plus Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers in an industry-wide strike to shut down auto production. The auto companies and their investors are relying on the UAW to keep the struggle contained to GM.

To sustain workers for a real fight, strike benefits must be tripled to \$750 a week.

Workers are not only fighting the auto companies but the powerful financial interests behind them, which are determined to reduce all workers to the status of low-paid casual workers. The strike by GM workers must be

transformed into a powerful counter-offensive by the working class in the US and internationally against social inequality and the endless attacks on jobs and living standards of workers around the world.

While the UAW is claiming talks are faltering, nothing that comes out of Solidarity House can be believed. The UAW officials could quickly reverse themselves again and announce that a tentative agreement has been reached.

Rank-and-file committees are needed to oppose any rush back to work without a ratification vote, to demand that the full contract be released, and that workers be given sufficient time to study and discuss it before a vote. Committees will demand rank-and-file supervision over the ratification process to prevent fraud and the stuffing of ballots.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the UAW has already made deals on the health care and temp issues—the latter involving the conversion to full-time positions *only after three consecutive years of service*. The UAW is supposedly looking for some increase in pensions and 401(k) retirement benefits for workers who have not had a cost-of-living raise since 2007, and a wage or bonus increase above the two percent a year offered by GM.

The UAW has been pleading with GM to provide a fig leaf to help it sell the deal to striking workers and then to workers at Ford and Fiat Chrysler. Analysts have already warned that workers could reject on principle anything brought back by the UAW, whose top officials and bargainers took company bribes and misused union funds.

Commenting on GM's hard line, Colin Lightbody, a former Fiat Chrysler labor negotiator, told the *Detroit News*, "My guess is the UAW made some movement on these two topics [temporary workers and health care] and may be expecting GM to up the ante significantly on the economics in order to justify this three-week strike to its members," Lightbody said. "GM may not be willing to reciprocate to the extent the union expects."

The UAW's actions are the inevitable outcome of decades of labor-management collusion, economic nationalism and the defense of the capitalist system.

The UAW is not opposed to deep cuts in health care; it has been the foremost proponent of such cuts to boost the competitiveness of US companies. It is not opposed

to the extension of temporary labor; it has already agreed to countless local agreements at Brownstown, Orion and other plants that expand the use of temps and contract workers in factories. As long as these workers pay dues, the UAW will enforce the most brutal forms of exploitation.

This is the framework for the supposed "saving" of the Detroit-Hamtramck plant, which is scheduled to close in January, and GM'S proposal to build a joint-venture electric battery plant near the now-shuttered Lordstown, Ohio plant.

The strike by GM workers in the US, the walkouts by Korean GM workers and the heroic stand of GM workers in Silao, Mexico, who have been victimized for refusing to take on extra work during the US strike, show the striving of workers to unite their struggles internationally. This struggle must be guided by an international socialist strategy, including the transformation of the global auto industry into a public enterprise, democratically controlled and collectively owned by the international working class.



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