UAW promoting anti-Mexican nationalism to isolate and defeat GM strike

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On Thursday, October 10 at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter *is hosting an online meeting to discuss the strategy and perspective needed to win the strike. To participate, visit* ***wsws.org/autocall****.*

As the General Motors strike continues through its fourth week, autoworkers are confronted with the need to break the isolation imposed on strikers by the United Auto Workers. In opposition to the strategy of the UAW, which is to leave GM workers to fend for themselves and to wear them down with poverty strike pay, workers must organize independently in order to expand the strike to Ford, Fiat Chrysler and the entire auto industry.

This is inseparably bound up with the fight to unite American autoworkers with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico and throughout the world. Already, GM and its suppliers have been forced to shut down factories throughout Mexico and lay off thousands of workers because of supply shortages caused by the strike.

The global impact of the strike in the United States demonstrates that the fates of autoworkers in every country are inextricably bound together. No struggle of workers in one country can be successful without linking up with their class brothers and sisters internationally.

The courageous stand taken by Mexican GM workers at its Silao plant to refuse any increase in production during the strike demonstrates the powerful potential that exists for such a global strategy. GM has retaliated against them by firing the most militant workers, while temporarily idling the massive Silao complex to head off the danger of a rebellion.

The stand taken by Mexican workers in defense of US strikers contrasts sharply with the conduct of the UAW, which according to workers is allowing Ford and Fiat Chrysler to force its employees to work overtime and weekends to stockpile vehicles to weaken their position, should they decide to join GM workers on strike. In so doing, the UAW is demonstrating that it is an organization dedicated to scabbing on its own membership.

As the strike continues to wear on, the UAW is more stridently pushing anti-Mexican rhetoric in its official communications, falsely presenting it as a matter of "job security." In a letter published Tuesday, UAW Vice President for GM Terry Dittes declared, "We have made it clear that there is no job security for us when GM products are made in other countries for the purpose of selling them here in the USA. We believe that the vehicles GM sells here should be built here."

In an article published Wednesday night, the *Detroit Free Press* described shifting production from Mexico to the United States as a key issue that has emerged in the contract talks. "[G]oing after [product allocated] for Mexico is what the UAW is trying to do," industry analyst Kristin Dziczek told the newspaper.

In essence, the UAW is responding to the stand taken by Mexican workers by demanding that they be fired *en masse* and their jobs shipped to the United States. They are terrified that the unification of autoworkers across national boundaries will cut across their attempts to isolate the strike and force through the company's demands.

In the name of protecting "American" jobs and the bolstering the UAW's dues base, the UAW will accept massive concessions, as it has for decades. But this has failed to save a single job over the last forty years. Total employment at the Detroit Three has fallen from over 750,000 in 1978 to 154,000 today.

"GM can't just flat-out say all future manufacturing

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will take place in the United States, unless the UAW says, 'We will adjust our wages downward, if necessary, in order for the U.S. manufacturer to be competitive,'" University of Michigan professor Erik Gordon told the *Free Press*.

Two likely solutions, according to Gordon, are either for the UAW to "agree to fewer workers who earn higher wages" or "agree to more workers who earn lower wages" – in other words, the UAW will either agree to layoffs or wage cuts (or some combination of the two) to move production back to the United States.

One possible model for such an agreement was given by GM's initial offer, which provided for a new battery plant in northeast Ohio, ostensibly to replace the shuttered Lordstown Assembly Plant. It would employ a fraction of the workforce, who would top out at $18 per hour but still pay UAW dues. The UAW has identified foreign competition in lithium-ion batteries as a key area of concern. It demanded in a recent white paper that auto companies develop battery production in the United States.

There is no such thing as an "American" or "Mexican" vehicle. The auto industry is thoroughly globalized, and finished vehicles that roll off the assembly line are an ensemble of labor contributed by the labor of workers from countless countries.

According to Harvard University researcher Alonso de Gortari, only "one-third of the value of every vehicle shipped [from Mexico] to the US corresponds to value created directly by Mexican workers and Mexican vehicle parts." The remainder "corresponds to the value of foreign parts imported from outside Mexico," and of this, roughly three-quarters is the value of parts imported to Mexico *from the United States* for final assembly.

The auto companies have been able to whipsaw workers of different countries to drive down wages only due to the paralyzing and toxic role played by the UAW and its counterparts in other countries, which also promote the lie of protecting "native" jobs against competition from foreign workers.

In South Korea, where auto unions have been forced to call partial strikes at GM over the past few months, the union bureaucracy is organizing a boycott of American-made vehicles. They have made no appeal to GM workers in the United States because their primary concern is protecting the Korean auto industry from foreign competitors.

But the nationalism of the UAW does not reflect the attitude of autoworkers themselves, who have responded with instinctive and powerful class solidarity to appeals for unity with Mexican workers. "All auto workers worldwide should go on strike now!" one autoworker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter.*

Many "native-born" American autoworkers work side-by-side with immigrants in the factories. Immigrants are especially prevalent in facilities closer to the Mexican border such as GM's assembly plant in Arlington, Texas.

"We have no problem with them," an Arlington worker told the WSWS. "They go back home to visit their families, then they come back and tell us about how things are for the workers down there."

He concluded: "If American, Canadian and Mexican workers sat down together, that would show the bigger picture."

The fight to expand the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler, and to unite the American workers with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico requires the formation of rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the UAW. These committees should draw up demands to meet the needs of workers, not the companies, including the demand that all victimized workers in Mexico be rehired.

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