

After secret meeting with CEO Mary Barra, UAW moving to shut down GM strike

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The top leaders of the United Auto Workers held a secret meeting with General Motors CEO Mary Barra Wednesday afternoon. The meeting makes clear that the UAW is moving rapidly to shut down the 26-day strike by 48,000 GM workers and push through a new labor agreement dictated by the global automaker and Wall Street.

The *New York Post* broke the news Thursday, saying UAW President Gary Jones and Vice President Terry Dittes had been hustled into Barra's office for their first face-to-face meeting since the strike started on September 16.

"Jones and Dittes were escorted by armed guards to Barra's office in the Detroit Renaissance office complex, where GM is headquartered, for a meeting that lasted about half an hour," the *Post* reported, citing an inside source. The meeting was shrouded in secrecy, as with all the other reports of the supposed "negotiations" between the UAW and GM.

"During Wednesday's surprise meeting, it's unclear whether Barra offered or demanded any concessions, or what specific issues were discussed," the newspaper reported. The UAW has not released any information about the meeting or even acknowledged it happened. One source cited by the *Detroit Free Press* said the meeting had "injected new energy into the negotiations."

"After the discussion, bargainers in subcommittees met until about 3 a.m. Thursday before recessing and resuming talks midmorning," the *Free Press* noted, saying it was the first late-night work session since the strike began.

In so far as the "talks" are continuing, it is only because the UAW fears that the terms of the contract it has already agreed to will be rejected by rank-and-file workers outraged over decades of UAW-backed

concessions and the exposure of the UAW as a bribed agent of the auto bosses.

GM is taking a hard line. Instead of throwing the UAW a bone, company negotiators floated the idea of shutting down the jointly run UAW-GM Center for Human Resources, which funnels \$9-12 million a year into the coffers of the UAW. The CHR, which workers refer to as the Center for Hidden Relatives, has been source of padded salaries and huge kickbacks for union officials and their families.

Backed by powerful Wall Street interests, GM has been willing to absorb the short-term cost of a protracted strike, which is already estimated at \$1.13 billion in lost profits, in order to achieve its long-term goals of gutting health care benefits, closing underutilized plants and tripling the number of temporary workers who can quickly be fired in the event of a sales slowdown.

For the corporate and financial elite, the defeat of the strike is a strategic question because it would pave the way for the creation of a "flexible manufacturing workforce," made up of low-wage, at-will employees with no job protections or medical and retirement benefits.

In the face of this, the UAW is isolating the GM strikers. It has kept 110,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers on the job and sanctioned forced overtime and speedups to help the automakers stockpile in case of a strike. It has also put GM workers on poverty strike benefits of \$250 a week, hoping to exert as much economic pressure as possible on workers to wear them down.

"We should all be on strike," said a young temporary part-time employee (TPT) at Fiat Chrysler's Sterling Heights Assembly plant in suburban Detroit. "A lot of us have been on the GM workers' picket lines, and we

know that if they can push through a bad contract it will trickle down to us. They are bullying us to build more Dodge Ram trucks—and we’re ready to strike over that.

“The UAW extended the contract indefinitely, and now they are telling us they’ve almost ‘finalized’ a contract with FCA. All that is left, they say, is health care and the temps. But those are the main issues! We need health care because we work hard, and our bodies are beaten up. TPTs are nothing but at-will employees.”

The UAW has scheduled rallies today at the GM Tech Center in Warren, Michigan, where the company is continuing operations with contractors and other personnel. This will be another public relations stunt to promote Democratic politicians and conceal the UAW’s betrayal of the strike.

Over the last week, the UAW has carried out a charade showing its real contempt for workers. Late last week, Dittes claimed that “good progress” was being made toward a settlement. Then by Sunday, he declared negotiations had taken a “turn for the worse,” claiming that GM ignored a “comprehensive” proposal from the UAW, about which he gave no details. On Monday, Dittes said he received a formal counterproposal from GM and again concealed its contents, supposedly at the company’s request.

With a growing sentiment among all autoworkers for a joint struggle, Dittes rolled out the UAW’s anti-Mexican card. He claimed that the central issue in the strike is getting GM to close Mexican factories and shift production to plants closing in the US. “Economic gains in this agreement will mean nothing without job security,” Dittes declared, while another unnamed UAW negotiator said the whole contract was about, “Mexico, Mexico, Mexico.”

This is the same sham the UAW has peddled for 40 years. While blaming workers in other countries for the destruction of jobs by the corporations, UAW officials have insisted that US workers trade away their wages, benefits and working conditions to win “job security.” Since 1979, the number of GM workers has fallen from 460,000 to 48,000.

The anti-Mexican campaign is particularly filthy because GM workers in Canada, Mexico, Korea and other countries have been striving to unite their struggles with US autoworkers. This includes GM workers in Silao, Mexico who courageously defied management’s demands that they increase production

during the US strike. As a result, nine militant workers were fired.

In opposition to the nationalism of the UAW, striking GM workers on the picket lines have denounced the firings and expressed their solidarity with the Mexican workers.

The GM strike is in great peril. The most dangerous thing for workers would be to adopt a wait-and-see attitude and hope for the best. The UAW is working for the defeat of the strike by isolating workers and trying to starve them into submission. The strike can be won, but its conduct must be taken out of the hands of the UAW and its course radically changed.

GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers should form rank-and-file strike and factory committees to expand the strike and shutdown the entire auto and auto parts industry, including calling out all Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers.

To sustain workers for this battle, they must demand the tripling of strike pay to \$750 a week.

These committees should formulate their own demands, including a 40 percent raise, the immediate conversion of temps into full-timers, the abolition of the two-tier wage and benefit system, the reopening of Lordstown and other closed plants and the halting of all future closures with no concessions. Autoworkers should make a special demand that the Silao workers being reinstated with full back pay.



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