Auto strike in peril: UAW, GM prepare to end strike and impose contract betrayal

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The four-week strike by 48,000 General Motors workers is in danger. Dueling statements released by the company and the United Auto Workers make clear that both sides are frantically searching for a way to shut down the strike as soon as possible and force through sweeping concessions.

Last night, UAW Vice President for GM Terry Dittes issued a statement that must be taken as an urgent warning by all workers.

"A short time ago, today, Friday, October 11, 2019, we counterproposed to the Company's last offer," Dittes wrote. Stating that the union's new offer covered all outstanding issues, the letter pointed to the likelihood of an agreement, declaring, "If GM accepts and agrees to this group of proposals, we will have a Tentative Agreement."

Indicating that the UAW was prepared to accept further concessions beyond those already in its new counteroffer, Dittes added, "We will continue to work, again, over this weekend to reach a Tentative Agreement."

Dittes and the UAW are seeking to break the strike, which has already idled hundreds of thousands of auto and auto parts workers in the US, Mexico and Canada. The sudden announcement comes shortly after leading UAW officials met secretly with GM chief executive Mary Barra on Wednesday. Action is required by workers at all three US-based companies—GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler—to mobilize immediately to prevent this betrayal.

If an agreement is announced, workers must demand:

* No return to work without a non-rigged vote, overseen by election monitors chosen democratically by the workers themselves.

* The immediate release of the entire contract, including all memoranda of understanding, and at least one full week for workers to review the contract, line-by-line, before voting.

The UAW, having been forced to call a strike in the face of overwhelming sentiment among autoworkers for a nationwide walkout, has sought to isolate and wear down the strike from the beginning. It has forced Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers to stay on the job while management imposes overtime to stockpile vehicles. At the same time, it has compelled GM workers to subsist on starvation rations of $250 per week in strike pay, out of a strike fund worth nearly $800 million.

The UAW is promoting toxic anti-Mexican nationalism in order to preempt a unified struggle of American autoworkers and their class brothers and sisters across the border, and to justify concessions on the use of temps, health care benefits and wages in the name of maintaining American "competitiveness."

The task facing autoworkers is to move now to seize the initiative themselves and take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the company's bribed agents in the UAW. Autoworkers must hold meetings and discussions to lay the groundwork for the establishment of rank-and-file committees to formulate the workers' own demands, expand the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler and unify with workers internationally.

Wednesday's secret meeting between UAW negotiators and Barra made clear the company is demanding that the union end the strike. Escorted by armed guards to Barra's office in GM's headquarters in downtown Detroit, union President Gary Jones and Vice President Dittes received their marching orders. According to Dittes' own account, Barra demanded a quick resolution of outstanding issues so that the UAW could make a "comprehensive offer." "We agreed with that request," Dittes said.

General Motors had made a proposal to the UAW on

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Monday night. However, the UAW, acting under orders from GM, agreed to keep the contents of the proposal secret.

But by Thursday night, the company, under pressure from its Wall Street creditors and investors, apparently began to lose patience with the slowness of talks. In a letter to Dittes, GM Vice President for Labor Relations Scott Sandefur wrote that the company had expected but failed to receive a counter-offer from the UAW on Thursday. “As we have urged repeatedly, we should engage in bargaining over all issues around the clock to get an agreement,” Sandefur wrote.

On Friday, GM sent a letter directly to the UAW membership with the purported highlights of Monday’s offer, including “wages and lump-sum payments” and a “clear path to permanent employment” for temporary workers. This means, in plain language, an expansion of temp workers (with a meaningless “clear path” to full-time employment) and wage increases that do not keep pace with inflation, similar to an earlier proposal the company had described in almost identical language.

In response, the UAW released a statement denouncing the company’s alleged “delaying tactics.”

“Our members are ready to get back to work,” he wrote, “but GM is purposefully stalling the process to starve UAW-GM workers off the picket lines to protect millions of dollars of corporate bonuses.” The hypocrisy of the UAW is staggering, given the fact that it is starving out its own members in order to protect the massive “strike fund” that it uses as a slush fund for its luxury vacations and other forms of corruption.

Dittes released a video statement on the UAW’s Facebook page Friday afternoon in which he denounced the “company's strategy of releasing half-truths.”

This posturing of opposition to GM amounts to an unwitting admission of the UAW’s own treachery. If the company has been bargaining in bad faith, then why has the union maintained a wall of silence on the content of the talks and why has it refused to spread the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler?

Only last Friday, Dittes released a letter announcing that the two sides had made “good progress” in the negotiations and suggesting that a tentative agreement was imminent. The UAW is now effectively admitting that it had been lying to its members from the beginning.

The UAW and GM are not adversaries. They are co-conspirators, involved not in “negotiations” but in strategy sessions over how to impose concessions on the autoworkers.

The role of the UAW was summed up in union-sponsored “rally” held yesterday at GM’s Warren Technical Center. While the UAW claimed in a leaflet to be mobilizing its membership from throughout the Detroit area, the rally was a stunt attended by no more than few dozen people, primarily members of the bureaucracy and local Democratic Party politicians. The UAW has made no attempt to appeal to the white-collar employees who work at the facility, and it has forced pickets to watch from the curb as hundreds of salaried workers enter and exit the facility on a daily basis.

The cynicism of the union contrasted sharply with the attitude of those workers who participated in the rally. They expressed a powerful desire for unity across the industry and internationally.

“I believe in a society based on equality worldwide,” a health care worker said. “[The UAW] should not be splitting us from our brothers and sisters in Mexico. In every country workers have the same interests.

“To fight against each other gets us nowhere. That’s why they want to continue the division. They want the power to control us.”

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