

As strike wave grows, UAW scrambles to shut down GM walkout and impose sellout contract

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On Thursday, October 17 at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online meeting to provide a strike update and discuss the strategy and perspective needed to win this struggle. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

The United Auto Workers will convene its national General Motors Council tomorrow morning in Detroit in an effort to shut down the month-long strike by 48,000 GM workers and impose a pro-company contract.

GM workers must be warned and prepared to block any attempt to end the strike on the company's terms, which is exactly what the union will do unless the workers intervene independently to end the UAW-imposed isolation of the strike and spread the walkout to Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

While no tentative agreement has been announced, news releases are filled with reports of an impending deal. General Motors CEO Mary Barra and GM President Mark Reuss have joined the talks, along with UAW President Gary Jones and Vice President Terry Dittes, in what one source told cable business news channel CNBC could be "the home stretch."

With a strike wave growing in the US and internationally, including walkouts by Mack-Volvo truck workers and copper miners in Arizona and Texas, and a looming strike by 30,000 Chicago teachers and support staff, the UAW is anxious to shut down the GM strike as soon as possible.

According to an announcement by the UAW, the GM Council on Thursday will receive a strike "update" and address "any other agenda items to be determined." The body, made up of 175 local union presidents, vice presidents and other bureaucrats, would almost certainly rubber stamp any tentative agreement brought back by the UAW International.

The UAW has floated the possibility of the council voting to end the strike before workers get to ratify a deal. Knowing this would provoke widespread opposition, the UAW International will use the meeting to assess whether local officials think the workers are sufficiently worn down and economically distressed to go back to work without a vote. In any event, the local officials will be given their marching orders to push through any deal that is reached with the kind of lying and bullying that were employed to override rank-and-file opposition in 2015 and in previous contracts.

There is enormous opposition in the ranks to another sellout. "This contract is going to show which side the UAW is on," said Joe, a young worker at GM's Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant. "They've supposedly been negotiating night and day, but if this is not the right contract, I'm going to vote 'no.' We've lost too much money in every contract."

He continued, "Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers should have already been out with us. We would have ended the strike by now. But the UAW is dividing us, making it easier for the companies, not the workers. With the Mack-Volvo strike, there is a momentum building and we could get all workers in this country to walk out."

From the beginning the "negotiations" have been a farce. The UAW has colluded with management for decades in imposing the companies' dictates. Over the last 14 years alone, the UAW has enabled GM to reduce its hourly labor costs by a staggering two-thirds, from \$16 billion in 2005 to \$5 billion today. The UAW has already accepted a continuation of the hated two-tier system, an expansion of super-exploited temporary workers, and further cuts in the medical benefits and pensions of current, future and retired workers.

Knowing they will confront huge opposition, UAW

officials are pleading with GM to sugar-coat a deal with higher signing bonuses, promises about converting temporary workers to full-time status, and proposals to “save” jobs or keep plants open, which will inevitably include more wage and benefit concessions.

While none of the leaks to the corporate media can be taken at face value, the news reported Tuesday night by the *New York Post* that the UAW and GM had “agreed in principle” to give temporary workers “the opportunity to become full-time workers after three years of consecutive service” is particularly cynical. This is a meaningless provision since there would be nothing to stop the company from repeatedly laying off temporary workers before they could ever reach the three-year threshold. Its real purpose would be to provide a cover for a major expansion of temporary labor both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the UAW workforce.

Despite the cost of the strike to GM—now estimated at \$2 billion—Wall Street has made it clear it will torpedo GM stock prices if executives retreat in the slightest from the bankers’ demands that the company cut another \$500 million in annual labor costs—roughly \$5 an hour—and create a “flexible manufacturing force” of largely at-will employees as GM transitions to electric and autonomous vehicles.

In a note to investors Tuesday, Bank of America analyst John Murphy said, “A prolonged strike could burn significant cash and bring GM to its knees, but investors likely will also react negatively if management is perceived to have caved into labor’s demands and GM’s long-term competitiveness is threatened.”

GM is tightening the screws on UAW officials—many of whom, including UAW President Gary Jones, face jail time in connection with a widening federal corruption probe of the union—by threatening to shut down the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources. The joint training center has long been a pipeline for the transfer of company cash to the UAW in exchange for signing and enforcing agreements that have saved GM billions.

Autoworkers must prepare now to defeat any sellout deal brought back by the UAW. First, they must oppose any effort to rush them back to work without a ratification vote. The basic principle of “no contract, no work” must be restored.

Second, they must demand the release of the full contract, including all side agreements, and a full week to study and discuss it before any vote. Workers must insist on supervising the ratification process to prevent ballot-stuffing or other forms of fraud.

GM workers must act now and form rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the corrupt UAW and expand the strike to Ford, Fiat Chrysler and the parts industry. Autoworkers must unite with striking Mack-Volvo truck workers, Arizona and Texas copper miners and Chicago teachers who are threatening to strike this week, to begin the mobilization of the entire working class against the decades-long assault on jobs and living standards.

Strike pay must be tripled to \$750 a week, paid for by immediately lowering the salaries of the International, regional and local officers to the level of a striking worker and selling off the assets of the joint training centers.

As Detroit-Hamtramck striker Joe told the WSWS, the miserable \$250 a week the UAW is currently paying in strike benefits is “aimed at drying us out and forcing us to vote ‘yes’ on the contract.” He added, “The \$25 a week increase [approved by the UAW last week] was a slap in the face, and we didn’t even receive it this week. This is just showing that the UAW is not for us, it’s in the pockets of GM.”

Agreeing with the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter’s* demand for a tripling of strike pay, he said, “If we were making \$750 a week, we could pay our bills. They just want to put pressure on us to go back to work. All those luxury vacations that the UAW leaders have been taking have been with our money, our strike fund.”

Commenting on the warnings from the *Autoworker Newsletter*, he said, “On the picket lines in Detroit, workers are saying the socialists are right. They’re the only ones giving us info. The *Newsletter* has certainly opened my eyes about the UAW and political issues. I’ve been walking blind for a long time. The Democrats and Republicans aren’t for the workers. The rich are always finding some way to screw us. It’s time workers in the US and around the world come together to fight.”



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