

Fiat Chrysler workers face off against the UAW, an “FCA-controlled enterprise”

Jerry White
4 December 2019

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding its next online meeting Thursday, December 5, at 7 p.m. Eastern Time to discuss how to oppose the UAW's pro-company conspiracies and fight for workers' interests. To register, go to wsws.org/autocall.

Local United Auto Workers officials are gathered today in Detroit to rubber-stamp the UAW's new tentative agreement with Fiat Chrysler, modeled after the rotten agreements at GM and Ford. Thus begins what the UAW hopes will be the final stage of its dirty work of imposing pro-company contracts on 155,000 General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers.

The contract fight at FCA takes place under extraordinary conditions. The UAW president has been forced to resign for embezzling millions in union dues money to host golf outings, luxury villa stays and expensive meals for UAW officials. Nine leading UAW officials and the widow of the UAW vice president who led the FCA department have been charged or convicted for taking bribes or stealing union assets, with federal prosecutors saying they are only halfway done with their investigation.

In a federal lawsuit, GM charged that its crosstown rival FCA gained an unfair competitive advantage because “FCA Group, through a pattern of racketeering activity, acquired and maintained an interest in and/or control of the UAW.” The UAW's current lead negotiator with FCA, Cindy Estrada, has already been linked to a corruption scheme at the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources.

There are a host of pseudo-left organizations that insist no matter what the UAW does, autoworkers have no choice but to accept its authority as their supposed “representative.” These groups never tire of denouncing the Socialist Equality Party for calling on autoworkers to form rank-and-file factory committees,

independent of the UAW, to fight for their interests.

The question arises: What exactly must the UAW do for it to no longer be considered a “workers' organization?” One judges an organization not by what it calls itself, but by what it is and does. In all its actions, the UAW has demonstrated that it is a criminal syndicate and arm of corporate management.

In exchange for bribes, UAW leaders have given away the jobs, wages and working conditions of autoworkers, causing incalculable suffering for workers and their families.

Over the last 40 years, starting with the 1979 Chrysler bailout when the UAW president joined the company's board of directors, the UAW has negotiated one concessions contract after another, reducing real wages by more than 50 percent and sanctioning the destruction of more than 600,000 jobs and the decimation of Detroit, Cleveland, Dayton and other industrial cities.

The UAW has done everything it can to suppress working class resistance, ramming through contracts by threats and fraud. When it is forced to call a strike, as with the 40-day strike against GM this year, it is not to fight the company, but to wear down workers on poverty-level strike pay and impose management's demands.

The UAW systematically pits against each other workers in different countries, companies and plants, and between workers of different ages and “tiers.” It does not unite workers, but divides them.

The UAW has sanctioned the victimization of workers, including the termination of dozens of workers immediately after the GM strike, some with more than 20 years' seniority, for “strike-related activities,” including posts on social media. The UAW has remained silent on the firing of seven GM workers

in Silao, Mexico for courageously refusing to take on additional work during the US strike.

Even as the number of workers in the UAW has fallen by hundreds of thousands, the assets of the organization have grown, as the auto companies funneled *billions* of dollars in both legal and illegal bribes into its bank accounts.

Leon Trotsky, the great Marxist internationalist, wrote in 1937 that in so far as the unions, despite their defense of capitalist private property, led the struggle of workers for “an increase—or at least against a diminution—of their share of the national income,” they could still be called “workers' organizations.”

If, however, the unions were to “defend the income of the bourgeoisie from attacks on the part of workers; should they conduct a struggle against strikes, against the raising of wages, against help to the unemployed, then we would have an organization of scabs, not workers.”

Is it not clear that this is precisely what the UAW does, and therefore what it is? The UAW, moreover, is merely a particularly blatant example of a general rule that applies to the AFL-CIO as a whole, as well as the official trade unions around the world. The Democratic Socialists of America and other organizations that insist that workers must accept the stranglehold of the unions do so not *despite of* but *because of* their role in suppressing the class struggle.

The upper-middle class layers that form the base of these organizations have greatly benefited from the stock market boom that has resulted from the driving down of workers' living standards. And there is always the prospect of lucrative positions within the union apparatus for themselves.

For workers, the question is: What must be done? There will be no shortage of efforts to revive the credibility of the UAW through a government takeover or internal shakeup.

While workers justifiably welcome the prosecution of corrupt UAW officials, they must be on guard against the maneuvers of the Trump administration, which is not intervening to strengthen workers against these attacks.

This was made clear in an interview in the *Detroit News* this week with US Attorney Matthew Schneider, the Trump appointee leading the corruption investigation. Schneider stated that some form of

federal trusteeship “should not be taken off the table,” and made clear that the Justice Department’s aim is to restructure the UAW so it can more effectively do the bidding of the corporations.

As a model for union cooperation, Schneider pointed to the role of the unions during the forced bankruptcy of Detroit, when they agreed to an unprecedented attack on public employee pensions.

The elevation of a would-be reformer to the top of the UAW would not change the nature of the organization. Its transformation into a bribed tool of management is the result of decades of collusion with the auto bosses, its defense of the capitalist system and its reactionary nationalist program.

Autoworkers need new organizations, rank-and-file factory committees, that are led by the most class conscious and militant workers, who are subject to the democratic control of the workers themselves. These committees will not accept the “right” of the corporations to close plants or lay off and victimize workers. Instead, they will assert the collective will of the workers and fight for industrial democracy and workers’ control of production and safety conditions.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on FCA workers to form such committees now to prepare and organize opposition to the contract the UAW is seeking to force down their throats.

To mount a genuine struggle against the transnational corporations, which have a global strategy to attack workers, autoworkers need their own global strategy to unite across borders and coordinate their struggles. This must be joined with the fight to build a mass socialist movement of the working class to end capitalist exploitation and reorganize the world economy on the basis of production and distribution for human need, not private profit.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact