

UAW calls off GM Subsystems strike at last minute, announcing tentative agreement

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Are you a GM Subsystems worker? Fill out the form at the end of the article and tell us us what you think about the UAW's cancellation of the strike, the tentative agreement and what your working conditions are like. We will protect your anonymity.

The United Auto Workers union announced that it was calling off a strike Thursday morning by 700 General Motors Subsystems employees, shortly before the walkout had been scheduled to begin, stating it had reached a tentative agreement with the company. Workers had been set to walk out at four GM plants in Michigan Thursday at 10 a.m., having been kept on the job by the UAW without a contract since May 2021.

GM Subsystems is a wholly owned subsidiary of GM, employing material handlers and warehouse workers. Under an arrangement with the UAW, GM Subsystems employees do the work formerly done by GM workers but for far lower wages.

Neither GM Subsystems nor the UAW have provided any details of the agreement. UAW Vice President for GM Terry Dittes stated in a letter announcing the deal, “Details will be forthcoming and will not be released until ratification at all four locations is conducted.” The letter cynically added, “This negotiation was drawn out and hard fought. We look forward to presenting the tentative agreement to members for their ratification.”

The secrecy shrouding the agreement and the entire negotiations process can only mean that the UAW is once again planning to try to ram through a sellout agreement which will keep GM Subsystems workers mired in poverty. Subsystems and other GM workers should organize now to demand the immediate release of the full contract, not just self-serving UAW “highlights,” and at least a week to study and discuss the agreement before any vote.

As of Wednesday night, no indication of the impending strike had been posted on the UAW’s web site, with the aim of keeping its hundreds of thousands of members in the dark on the struggle.

The UAW executives were undoubtedly anxious to avert a strike by GM Subsystems workers since it could have quickly impacted production at several of GM’s major plants.

Subsystems workers had been set to walk out at the Flint Assembly plant, which produces highly profitable pickup

trucks; the critical Lake Orion plant, which produces the Chevrolet Bolt EV and EUV; and the Lansing Grand River Assembly plant, which produces Cadillacs and the Chevrolet Camaro. Workers had also been scheduled to strike at GM’s flagship electric Factory Zero plant in Hamtramck, currently idled through late July, which produces the GMC Hummer pickup and Hummer SUV.

An anonymous UAW representative nervously told the *Detroit Free Press* that a strike “could shut down production in a matter of hours depending on what GM’s plan is. That means it could idle the 500 workers at Lear and 300 to 400 at Flint Metal and ... 5,500 at Flint Assembly.”

The struggle at GM Subsystems takes place amid a growing wave of militancy among autoworkers, which is increasingly taking the form of a direct rebellion against the UAW. On Monday, auto parts workers at Ventra Evert in Michigan voted down a UAW-endorsed contract by nearly 95 percent. CNH farm and heavy equipment workers in Wisconsin and Iowa, meanwhile, have been on strike for nearly two months, fighting to reverse concessions previously imposed by the UAW.

The UAW had already made clear its intentions to sabotage a strike by Subsystems workers should one take place. On Wednesday, UAW Vice President Dittes had released a letter ordering GM workers to cross picket lines. “As a General Motors employee covered by Paragraph 117 of 2019 UAW-GM National Agreement, you must continue to report to work in the event of a strike by the Subsystems unit,” the letter stated. “In addition, you may not take part in the picketing that will accompany a strike.” A separate letter addressed to maintenance workers employed by Aramark at the plants states they may “honor picket lines if you choose.”

The 2019 GM contract cited by Dittes was the illegitimate product of the UAW’s sellout of the six-week-long strike of 46,000 GM workers, which had won the support of auto and other workers internationally.

Within weeks of the UAW ramming the contract through in October, then-UAW President Gary Jones would resign in disgrace, and later plead guilty for his role in embezzling autoworkers’ dues. Among other UAW officials who negotiated and signed the 2019 agreement—which sanctioned the closure of the Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant and other

factories—were Derik and Justin Jewell. They are the sons of former UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Norwood Jewell, who was charged and convicted in early 2020 for his role in a million-dollar bribery scheme in the UAW.

As is widely known by autoworkers, the 2019 Big Three contracts, not to mention a series of brutal contracts before them, were “negotiated” in bad faith, with the process overseen by criminals who were either on the take from the companies or rampantly stealing workers’ dues.

With the cooperation of the UAW, GM has used GM Subsystems to create in effect yet another tier of hyper-exploited workers. Subsystems workers generally start at just \$15 an hour and top out at \$17 an hour, about half the pay for first-tier assembly workers, who make around \$31 an hour.

In 2018, UAW Vice President for General Motors Cindy Estrada, with the support of the leadership of UAW Local 5960 at the Lake Orion plant, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) behind workers’ backs allowing the replacement of 150 full-time workers with lower wage workers. The UAW claimed that such a deal was necessary to “save” jobs.

The UAW’s secret agreement with the company provoked outrage among workers when it was revealed. In May 2018, workers angrily confronted union officials at a packed meeting over the deal. A letter was circulated by workers beforehand denouncing the UAW’s actions, stating:

The time to act is now against the mistreatment and mismanagement of our collective workforce. Both the UAW and GM have decided that it is in our best interest to outsource the materials department without first consulting the membership here at Orion Assembly. Our local leadership admittedly signed the MOU in February and withheld this information from us. This is at a minimum a violation of our right to fair representation and collective bargaining.

The Lake Orion plant was initially slated for closure as part of the Obama administration’s restructuring of the auto industry following the 2008 market crash. Lake Orion reopened in 2011 under a UAW-stamped sellout agreement.

GM reversed the decision to close its Detroit-Hamtramck factory after the UAW handed over concessions in the 2019 contract. GM then axed its remaining 800 employees and retooled to begin production on electric vehicles. The facility opened in November 2021 and, like Lake Orion and many other Big Three plants, includes a multi-tiered pay scale for its employees.

In the scramble to dominate electric vehicle technologies and markets, the automakers are accelerating their attempts to lower wages and further undermine workplace protections. In

addition to GM’s use of Subsystems workers in its EV operations, Ford Motor Company has been working to extract concessions from workers in Germany and Spain. The company has collaborated closely with the German and Spanish unions and works councils to pit workers in a fratricidal race to the bottom in the name of “saving jobs” and winning new EV models.

Whether in Europe or the US, the pro-corporate unions have repeatedly shown their willingness to offer up cost cuts and create new categories of low-paid workers, as long as the flow of dues money is maintained.

A Stellantis Jefferson North worker in Detroit told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that GM Subsystems workers “deserve support. But that’s not the UAW International’s position. They are divide and conquer for the glory of the money GM will give them. I can’t believe I pay for this crap.”

A retired GM worker said, “When we were on strike, we finally had the company ready to come to the table. The UAW didn’t even bother to get COLA back; we got NOTHING from that strike.”

“The UAW is a wolf in sheep’s clothing,” he continued. “The union leaders are part of the oligarchy now. Nothing good will come without a struggle. The working class must unite against the ownership class.”

GM Subsystems workers should take their cue from fellow UAW members at Ventra, a subsidiary of Flex-N-Gate, who have organized a rank-and-file committee to demand substantial wage increases and the removal of the bargaining committee that negotiated the sellout agreement workers voted down Monday.

At the same time, the struggle of GM Subsystems workers requires the active support of workers throughout the Big Three and auto parts plants. Contrary to the endless efforts of the UAW bureaucracy to divide and weaken workers, it will only be through a common fight that the tier system and lowering of wages will finally be reversed.



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