

As contract deadline approaches, US autoworkers want all-out strike

By Shannon Jones
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With the contracts for 158,000 US autoworkers set to expire midnight Saturday, there is a mood of determination in the factories for a serious fight to reverse decades of concessions and eroding living standards.

In the hours leading up to the contract expiration, United Auto Workers officials, as they have done all summer, are keeping workers in the dark over the progress of contract negotiations and any plans for strike action.

Meanwhile, local UAW officials at GM plants have been called to Detroit over the weekend, where they will vote on a settlement if a deal is reached.

The nervousness of the UAW is reflected in the issuance of strike instruction bulletins warning against possible wildcat actions. A memo by UAW officials at the GM Wentzville, Missouri assembly plant cautioned workers, “There are many rumors circulating about. Remember, until we have been given direction by our shop chairman they are just rumors.”

The announcement Friday by the UAW that it was granting “indefinite” contract extensions to Ford and Fiat Chrysler angered many workers, who are anxious for a fight. With this announcement the UAW is underscoring that it will negotiate agreements with Detroit automakers piecemeal in order to better separate workers and prevent them from exercising their collective industrial strength.

Expressing the militant mood among the rank and file, a worker at the Fiat Chrysler Toledo Jeep complex told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “This contract has been dragging on and it has been four years now. We want to strike now. We are ready Saturday at midnight.

“When the union sent the letter about the ‘indefinite’ contract extension, everyone started getting pissed off.

Then they sent us home early. It may have just been coincidental, but people are angry.”

Further inflaming tensions was a report that local UAW officials at the GM Spring Hill, Tennessee assembly plant instructed janitorial workers to cross the picket lines of hourly workers in the event of a walkout at the facility.

Meanwhile, reports in the business press have already indicated the main thrust of the demands of the auto companies, including a rollback in workers’ “gold plated” health care benefits and a significant expansion in temporary and contract workers. This has been accompanied by a barrage of media propaganda against autoworkers, including vastly inflated figures on workers’ hourly compensation.

The expiration of the contract with the Detroit automakers takes place under conditions where the UAW has been thoroughly discredited by ongoing revelations of corruption reaching to the highest levels, including the offices of UAW President Gary Jones. This has evoked comments in the big business press expressing concern that the UAW may not be able to impose the deep cuts in the upcoming contracts that Wall Street investors are seeking.

As a senior worker at the GM Wentzville plant near St. Louis said regarding the latest revelations of UAW corruption, “I’m just sitting here thinking about all the trips the ‘committees’ took and the women the union reps would take to Palm Springs and elsewhere. And those women would come back bragging about the fancy dinners and spa days, shopping... with our money.”

GM is boasting that it has substantial stockpiles of its best-selling vehicles, allowing it to weather a short strike with little damage. The inventories have been built up by increasing production at key facilities and

scheduling large amounts of overtime, without any resistance on the part of the UAW.

A worker at the Fiat Chrysler Kokomo Transmission Plant in Indiana writing in the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* responded angrily to reports of speed-up and victimization of autoworkers at GM Silao in central Mexico, as the company attempts to stockpile vehicles in preparation for a possible strike.

“Exploiting the Mexican workers at all is barbarism,” he said. “Exploiting a group of Mexican workers, instead of treating the US workers with a contract we deserve, goes to show you that ALL workers are on the same team.

“Stand strong,” he added, directing his comments to the workers in Silao, “and when we strike because of the sellout contract that is soon to be pushed at us, regardless of what our UAW says, then I encourage and welcome my Mexican brothers and sisters to join us on that picket line.”

A *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* campaign team received a warm response Friday at the Fiat Chrysler Warren Truck Assembly plant outside Detroit. Workers wanted to know about UAW corruption. “I’ve known about this for a long time,” was a typical refrain. Workers also expressed concern over the implications of government intervention into the contract negotiations.

When the *WSWS* explained the necessity of workers building their own rank-and-file committees, many workers expressed interest.

A veteran worker at Warren Truck said, “They (the union) have a lid on any type of information at all. I tried to rattle some of the chains of people on the bargaining committee and they won’t say anything.

“What they get away with now is illegal. They think if they have done it once they can keep doing it. If there was one penny taken, it should be equally punishable as if it was \$10 million.”

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