

For a united offensive of autoworkers and steelworkers against the corporate-government assault

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Contracts covering 30,000 steelworkers at ArcelorMittal and US Steel facilities in the United States expire on September 1. Two weeks later, on September 15, contracts run out for 140,000 autoworkers at General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

This week, workers are expected to rally at steel mills in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Alabama and Minnesota to demand improved wages and conditions in the face of the intransigence of the corporations. Fiat Chrysler workers at factories across the Midwest voted last week to approve strike action, with many locals registering near unanimous votes.

The convergence of these contract expirations poses the potential and the necessity for a joint struggle against the corporate-government attack on the working class, which has produced record corporate profits and stock prices along with unprecedented levels of social inequality.

The American ruling class has no intention of making any concessions to the demands of workers for decent wages and working conditions and for job security after decades of plant closures, wage and benefit cuts and speedup. Workers can make gains only through a mass mobilization of their industrial power combined with a political strategy to defeat the attacks of both corporate-controlled parties.

The ruthlessness of the corporate and financial elite is demonstrated by the lockout of 2,200 steelworkers in six states by Allegheny Technologies Inc (ATI). On Saturday, the specialty steel manufacturer shut the gates at 12 factories and brought in strike-breakers and military-style security forces for what one union official described as a “D-Day assault” on workers. The lockout included 1,100 workers in Pittsburgh, the

historic center of steel manufacturing and the headquarters of the United Steelworkers union (USW).

ATI executives rejected groveling offers by the USW to extend the contract and hand over tens of millions of dollars in new concessions. When the USW failed to bring to a vote the company’s “last, best and final” offer, which included even more draconian cutbacks in health care, pensions, jobs and working conditions, the company decided to make an example of the workers. US Steel and ArcelorMittal, the world’s largest steelmaker, support this assault and will make similar demands if ATI is successful.

Throughout the United States and internationally, a spirit of resistance is growing in the working class, evidenced by a series of strikes in Germany, Britain, Australia, Brazil and other countries. In the seven years since the world economic crash of 2008, governments have poured trillions of dollars into the financial markets to fuel another speculative bubble. Vast sums are being used, not for productive purposes, let alone to improve the wages of workers, but for dividend payments, stock buybacks and corporate mergers that enrich the wealthy few while destroying the jobs and living standards of the working class.

These struggles have been systematically isolated and betrayed by the trade union officials. It is no different with the United Steelworkers and United Auto Workers. No worker should take as good coin the rhetoric of union bureaucrats about “fighting for a fair contract” or “restoring the middle class.” They have no intention of waging a serious struggle.

The contracts of some five million unionized US workers expire this year. Rather than fighting to unite workers in a common struggle, the unions have blocked

strikes and extended the contracts of hundreds of thousands US Postal Service, Verizon and AT&T telecom workers, as well as those of teachers in Chicago, Pittsburgh and Detroit.

When the unions were forced to call strikes, they moved quickly to isolate and betray them. This was shown in the USW's sabotage earlier this year of the oil refinery workers' strike. The union called out only 6,500 of the 30,000 USW workers in the industry, then starved the strikers into submission by denying them strike pay. In the end, the USW signed an agreement that expanded labor-management committees while doing nothing to address workers' demands for improved wages, safer working conditions and an end to inhumane levels of forced overtime.

The USW and the UAW have been complicit in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs, devastating cities such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Detroit. The unions have worked with Wall Street speculators and the government to transform what were once the highest paid industrial workers in the US into a cheap-labor workforce.

Autoworkers and steelworkers should unite to demand a 30 percent increase in pay, abolition of two-tier wage systems, full restoration of cost-of-living adjustments, ironclad protections against layoffs and plant closings, and a living income for the unemployed.

The fight for these demands pits workers against not only the steel and auto bosses, but also the Obama administration, both big business parties, and the capitalist profit system they defend.

Obama initiated the assault on workers' wages with the 2009 restructuring of the auto industry, which lowered the wages of newly hired autoworkers by half. His cynically named Affordable Care Act has been used to shift health care costs from the employers onto the backs of workers.

Far from opposing wage-cutting and other attacks, both USW President Leo Gerard and UAW President Dennis Williams have been appointed by Obama to sit on government boards dedicated to improving corporate competitiveness and boosting the administration's policy of "in-sourcing," i.e., slashing wages in America to poverty levels and convincing global corporations to produce in the US rather than China, Mexico or other low-wage countries.

These company men and government stooges, with

their six-figure salaries, are terrified that a victory by any section of workers will become the catalyst for a broader movement of the working class against their big business masters and the wage-cutter-in-chief, President Obama.

A united fight by auto and steel workers would win widespread support, not just from union workers, but from tens of millions of workers who are outside of these pro-company organizations, as well as from young people, unemployed workers, immigrant workers, students and retirees—all those who face poverty wages, staggering levels of debt, pension cuts, police violence and the threat of war.

The precondition for a serious struggle is to take the conduct of the contract battles out of the hands of the unions by electing rank-and-file action committees in the factories—democratically run and free of the control of the USW and UAW. These committees must reach out for support to the broadest sections of the working class in the US and internationally.

Poverty and inequality can be eradicated only if workers organize as an independent political force and fight for the socialist reorganization of the economy, including the transformation of the steel and auto industries into public utilities under the democratic control and common ownership of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party has already received a powerful response to our campaign to mobilize autoworkers for the coming struggle. We urge steelworkers and all other workers to subscribe to the *World Socialist Web Site* Autoworkers Newsletter and contact the SEP to build the necessary leadership for this fight.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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