

# New York City workers back autoworkers' contract fight

Our reporters  
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As General Motors autoworkers vote on the latest sellout offer backed by the United Auto Workers, the stirrings inside the industry are reverberating well beyond the factory floors of the Big Three.

Throughout the country, workers face a similar lineup of hostile forces: companies determined to extract ever greater profits, unions that function as an arm of corporate management, and two big-business parties that back the assault on the working class. Inequality in the US is at record levels, with corporate executives and wealthy investors pulling in astronomical sums while wages and benefits of workers are under relentless attack.

*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with telecommunications and transit workers in New York City about the struggle of autoworkers and the common conditions in their workplaces.

Approximately 39,000 Verizon workers, including roughly 10,000 in New York City, have labored without a contract since August. Four years after the Communications Workers of America and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers isolated and betrayed a two-week-long strike, the hugely profitable telecommunications giant is again intensifying its attack.

Workers told the WSWS of relentless harassment of field workers, short-staffing among office workers and aggressive speedup everywhere. The company is negotiating with the union to cut pension and health care benefits and eliminate job security.

Pedro, a Verizon worker with 15 years of experience, after some discussion of the autoworkers' contracts, said, "That is not the way it is supposed to work. If the company is doing well, workers should not have to take cuts.

"When I was hired, I was told you will be able to

afford a house with a white picket fence, and I am sure the autoworkers were told the same thing. Now this isn't a career, it is a job. This has an effect on quality of work people are doing, and overall a negative effect on the economy.

Asked about the connections between his job conditions and the political situation, Pedro replied, "The companies control the government, so the unions don't have a chance. You see these unions are 40 years behind in their outlook, and they don't fight."

Paris, who has worked at Verizon for 15 years, added, "Our union doesn't have shares in the company, but as long as the leadership has its head covered, they don't care. It is sickening to see so many unions in bed with the companies.

"We are facing the same thing at Verizon. The company is making millions, but we are suffering. We are all just numbers to them."

Pedro and Paris both voiced strong support for the autoworkers, encouraging them to "keep fighting."

Rosemary, another Verizon worker, said, "The guy on the top here makes millions in bonuses, and they turn it around and say we make too much. Rent, insurance, everything is getting more expensive. You try to save a little, but it's impossible. The whole situation is not good. The working class brought this country to where it is. I'm certain we're headed in the wrong direction. It's got to change."

Public sector workers in New York also saw similarities with autoworkers. After two years of an expired contract, the Transport Workers Union pushed through a concessions contract last year for 34,000 bus and subway workers in New York, increasing health care costs and offering paltry raises below inflation.

After decades of underfunding, New York's transit agency, the MTA, holds \$34 billion in debt, which it is

attempting to unload onto the backs of both workers and transit riders.

LaVar, a transit worker with eight years of experience, said, “The unions here and in auto put a political spin on everything, but they are really working to keep the status quo. They are always saying, ‘We did what we can,’ but in reality the unions have become complacent in some areas and greedy in others. The result is that now the unions and the companies have become bedfellows.

“What is happening here, in the US, is happening all over the world,” he added. “In Europe it is with austerity. When companies tighten their purse strings, it is always at the expense of workers.”

Reggie, a subway conductor, told the WSWs, “It is bad when these contract negotiations, like the autoworkers’, don’t benefit the workers. These contracts are not what the workers need these days. They are what the corporations need.

“The union is bowing down to the corporations so regularly it is hard to find a fair union. Workers’ fights are even harder because neither the Democrats nor Republicans are on our side. Now people don’t know who to vote for, because why should you vote for any politician who doesn’t do anything for you? Neither party has workers’ interests in mind. I think the best way to describe their relationship with the companies is that they are in bed with the companies. They get up in the morning seeing things from the standpoint of the companies.”



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