Romanian Ford workers must make international appeal!

World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* welcomes the militant uprising by Ford workers at the company's factory in Craiova, Romania and calls on autoworkers throughout Europe, North America and Asia to support their courageous struggle.

The issues in this battle are familiar to autoworkers the world over: poverty-level wages, incessant demands for concessions and speedup under the threat of layoffs or plant closings, and unions that operate as tools of the corporations, not organizations of the working class.

On December 21, an estimated 1,000 workers conducted a wildcat strike to oppose a rotten deal signed by the Ford Craiova Automobile Union and Ford Romania. Ford—which made $16.3 billion in gross profits in 2016 and $9.4 billion in the first three quarters of 2017—wants the factory's 4,200 workers to accept wage freezes for senior workers and a reduction in new hires' pay to five percent below the current minimum salary, or as little as €300 (US$358) a month. In addition, Ford is demanding a reduction in payments for overtime work and "flexible" work hours whenever "operational demands require it."

Ford and the union are using the threat of mass unemployment to blackmail workers. In a December 13 internal memo to workers, Ford Romania chief John Oldham wrote, "We need to reflect on what is critical at this crucial moment for the Craiova plant, to have a higher salary increase or to secure the future of this factory! We hope you understand the importance of this year's negotiation in the present politically and economically unstable climate."

In addition, the US-based corporation is using a new tax law implemented by the Romanian government as a hammer against the workers. The new law, which comes into effect on January 1, will shift the costs of health care and other social benefits from employers almost entirely onto the backs of workers. If workers rejected the current deal, Oldham warned, the company would present a "drastically smaller offer," which would not compensate workers for any of the higher tax costs they would bear, leading to a de facto pay cut of nearly 25 percent.

Defying these threats, hundreds of workers walked out of the factory last Thursday, chanting "Thieves, Thieves" and "There is slavery here." Workers coming in on the second shift joined the strike, shouting, "We are not going home until we gain our dignity." At the forefront of the struggle were younger workers, including many of the 1,700 hired earlier this year for the launching of Ford's EcoSport utility vehicle.

The strike was an explicit rebellion against the pro-company union, which colluded with management and unilaterally imposed its demands. In an attempt to get workers back onto the assembly lines, the union claimed it had never signed such a deal. Two days later, however, the union issued an internal memo saying it considered the protests "illegal" since it was operating under the old contract until it expired on December 31. The union considered the agreement it had signed on December 21 "legal" and would honor it once it goes into effect January 1.

In fighting the US-based auto giant, the Ford Craiova workers are taking a stand for autoworkers all over the world. Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Serbia and other Central and Eastern European countries have long served as the European ruling class's "Mexico," where multi-national corporations can exploit cheap labor and use the threat of "Eastern enlargement" to drive down wages and working conditions in the West.

After the Stalinist regimes restored capitalism in the region, VW, Renault, GM, Daewoo, Ford and other global automakers and suppliers rushed in to buy up state-owned factories at fire sale prices. Current Romanian wages can be as low as €2 (US$2.26) an hour, less than 10 percent of the overall labor costs of a German autoworker.

The ruling Romanian Social Democratic Party, which has imposed the tax hike on workers, is an offshoot of the Stalinist party that once ruled Romania. The social democrats and their partners across Eastern Europe have embraced free market policies and promoted virulent nationalism, transforming their countries into slave labor platforms for world corporations and creating conditions for the rise of far-right parties. The Romanian government is trying to undercut the region's traditional automotive producers—Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic (the Visegrad Four)—by offering even greater tax incentives and extending special economic zones to lure foreign investment.

When it comes to exploiting the working class, the global auto giants have an international strategy. As one industry analyst told the *Financial Times*, "Now investors that come to central and eastern Europe behave very differently from five or seven years ago. From a business perspective… People do not think about national ideas. They invest in the region."

The trade unions, across Europe, in the US and worldwide, however, are entirely nationalist. Far from fighting to unite workers in common struggle against the global corporations and the capitalist governments, the unions have aided and abetted the corporations by pitting workers against each other in a fratricidal race to the bottom.

In Germany, the autoworkers union, IG Metall, has enthusiastically welcomed the restoration of capitalism in East Germany and Eastern Europe. Sitting on the supervisory board of every major car company, it has actively supported the exploitation of Eastern European workers at minimum wages and used it to blackmail workers in Germany. This has led to the lengthening of the work day without wage increases, a

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drastic reduction in pay for new-hires, and the expanded use of part-time, temporary and casual workers. None of these concessions defended a single job.

In 2014, IG Metall supported the closure of the Ford factory in Gent, Belgium, with 4,600 workers at the Ford plant and an additional 5,000 workers at supplier companies losing their jobs. In the same year, IG Metall agreed to massive job reductions, flexible working conditions and wage cuts for the 24,000 workers at the German Ford plants in Cologne and Saarlouis after management threatened to transfer part of the production to Eastern Europe, including Craiova.

Now the Macron government in France is using the threat of mass sackings to impose its pro-corporate labor "reforms," which will expand the use of temporary workers and give corporations American-style power to fire workers at will.

The same thing is true in the United States, where the United Auto Workers union has long peddled nationalist poison, blaming workers in Mexico, China and other countries for supposedly "stealing American jobs," while collaborating with the auto bosses to drive down wages. In exchange, the UAW has been handed billions in corporate shares and bribes from GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler. A federal criminal trial is ongoing and UAW bureaucrats have pleaded guilty to serving as company stooges in exchange for thousands of dollars in corporate payouts.

The strike by Romanian workers is part of the growing opposition of the working class to the endless union-backed attacks across the world. Over the course of 2017, Fiat workers in Serbia and VW workers in Slovakia have struck against slave labor wages and conditions. Over the last several years, autoworkers in China and India have fought major battles, and in 2015 autoworkers in the US rebelled against the corrupt UAW.

For a successful fight to be waged to defend jobs and living standards, new organizations are needed to link the struggles of the working class worldwide, drawing them together in a fight against the corporations and their trade union accomplices.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* appeals to Romanian Ford workers to establish a rank-and-file committee, whose task must be to chart an independent course, free from the influence of the company, the union and the Romanian political establishment, to defend the rights of the working class.

Across Romania, workers are ready to fight the government's proposed tax overhaul. But the first task of the rank-and-file committee will be to reach out to autoworkers across Romania, Europe and the world for support.

The transnational corporations have an international strategy to wage war against the working class. The workers must therefore develop their own international strategy to wage the class struggle to defend their interests. Isolated from their brothers and sisters around the world, the workers at Craiova are pawns in the hands of the multinational corporations and their union allies. But Romanian workers confront the same issues as their international co-workers, and united they possess a tremendous social power: the company's profits come from the exploitation of their labor.

Workers at Craiova know who their most militant and trustworthy co-workers are. These workers have proven themselves in recent weeks by risking their jobs and their livelihoods to take a stand against inequality and the corporate-union dictatorship. The most courageous and principled of these workers must be democratically elected to lead a committee. They will then be held accountable by being subject to recall by the workers themselves. Mass meetings must be held to link new-hires and senior workers in a common fight. The company and union must be made aware that retributory firings will be opposed, exposed and publicized by a unified workforce. Social media groups used by workers to plan and communicate must be purged of union spies and company stoolpigeons.

There are plenty of national trade unions in Romania that may try to encourage workers to join their organizations and hand over organizing and negotiating to their bureaucrats. This would be a major mistake! The trade unions, even those not officially tied to the corporations, will only isolate workers and prepare future sell-outs. None have an international strategy to fight the international corporations. They are tied to the very political parties responsible for implementing the tax overhaul and they cannot be trusted. The success of the Craiova workers' struggle will be determined by their ability to retain their independence from the trade unions and the bourgeois parties, and by their ability to break their isolation and link up with fellow Ford workers internationally.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* is the only international news publication that has sought to educate workers internationally about the Craiova workers' fight. We have distributed our articles and discussed the Romanian Ford workers' struggles with autoworkers across the US and elsewhere. Romanian Ford workers should know that their struggle is being followed carefully by many autoworkers who send their full support.

Many Romanian Ford workers have only recently become familiar with the *World Socialist Web Site*. We are a revolutionary socialist publication and we are affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International. Our tendency was founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky, co-leader alongside Vladimir Lenin of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Trotsky was murdered by Stalinist agents in Mexico City.

We believe that the social rights of workers, who produce society's wealth, must take precedence over the greater accumulation of grotesque sums of personal wealth by the corporate and financial oligarchs, and that this requires a fight for socialism.

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