

“I think they should keep striking”

Chicago Ford workers speak out in support of West Virginia teachers

George Marlowe, Andy Thompson
6 March 2018

Over the weekend, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to autoworkers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, who expressed their support for the West Virginia teachers on strike. The autoworkers also spoke out against the conditions they face in their plant, enforced by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union and management.

The courageous actions by the West Virginia teachers—who defied the political establishment, their union leaderships and the state laws that make it illegal for them to strike—were recognized by the autoworkers as an important step forward for the working class as a whole.

Chandler, a first-tier autoworker, expressed his solidarity with the teachers. He said, “West Virginia teachers, keep up the good fight! Keep struggling for all of us. It’s very easy for representatives or union officials to tell you to accept a sellout deal when they have nice pay and salaries.

“Teachers should definitely be paid more and taken care of. Teachers are the educators of our children, our future, and we should invest more in education. We are not leading in education anymore. Teachers need to be paid for more, so they can train our children better. I think it’s important they get a major increase in their salaries too. We need to get other workers engaged and supporting them as well.”

Chandler noted the similarities between the West Virginia teachers, who face stagnant wages and exorbitant health care costs, and the rest of the working class. “The cost of living is going up for all of us,” he said. “What we got paid 15-20 years ago could sustain a family. Now it’s paycheck to paycheck. Across the board, I believe wages should go up for all workers.

The pay of the CEOs doesn’t go down. So this is why we need to fight for the working class and teachers.”

Conditions at Ford are particularly harsh, with a regime of inequality and a divisive multi-tier system enforced by the UAW. In particular, Chandler spoke out against the exploitation and mistreatment of Temporary Part-Time (TPT) workers. “I support the TPT workers,” he said. “The last contract allowed the language into the contract—it shouldn’t have happened.

“Temporary workers should not have to work two years to get hired on. They are losing a lot of potential pay because they can’t work a full 40 hours. That’s not right. They work alongside all of us and they don’t get the full benefits of health care, wages and the respect from the company. There shouldn’t be any tiers! The group in which I came in around 2010 has no pensions. Our future is bleak and we don’t have a pension. The state of society is so messed up that we have people still working in their 70s. Why do we have billionaires with so much wealth while the rest of us have no future?”

James, another first-tier autoworker, also expressed his support for the teachers. “Don’t give up! Stand strong!” he said. “Fight for what you believe in. Everyone should be treated equally across the board. If the union is giving you a bad deal, don’t take the deal! We had similar problems with our union. We have tiers and everyone is treated unequally. The TPT workers don’t have similar benefits like we do. They come in the door doing the same work and they should get everything that we get.”

“Workers create all the cars, all the wealth, all the work,” James added. “If they fired 100 of us at Ford, there are plenty of workers who will fill the job who are

struggling. But if everyone got together and was on the same page, including teachers and autoworkers, it would make a big difference. We could fight back.”

Michelle, another autoworker, expressed her support for the West Virginia teachers. She noted, “I think they should keep striking! If they can pull it off and get what they want, they should. These teachers bend over backward to help students, who sometimes even have disabilities. They should go for it and keep it up.”

After being told the WSWS has called for the strikes to expand to other industries in the state, Michelle responded, “It should come here too! When it comes time for the contract to come around we need to strike. Because we’re the ones making all the cars. We’re the ones putting everything in. Even my feet and back have been hurting, but I’m doing the best I can to take care of the family.”

When asked for her thoughts about TPT workers at her plant, Michelle replied, “I think temporary workers are good workers. They are trying their best to do as much as they can. When they come in, there should be maybe a 30-day evaluation to see if they do well, but after that make them full-time. They need to stop this laying them off and then bringing them back just to be laid off again.

“I’m a former TPT. I’ve been here off and on since 2007. In 2010, I was lucky to finally get full-time here, but in the meantime I had to work Ford and another job. It was hard to be a main provider when you don’t know if you have work every week.”

Mark, a veteran and an autoworker of six years, cheered the teachers on: “Teachers: persevere! Anything that’s worth doing is not going to be easy. It takes constant motion. If you have people to back you, and you have unity, then you have strength. These teachers are fighting for equality. They are taking a stand for the working class. The health care costs keep going up because the entire system is about making money and profits. Teachers should definitely fight back. No one should ever accept what they are handed.”



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