

“We have to join our struggles together”

Chicago Ford autoworkers support hotel workers on strike

George Marlowe, Marcus Day
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The ongoing strike by thousands of hotel workers in Chicago was on the minds of many workers at Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* this weekend.

Housekeepers, cooks, servers, bellhops and others are on strike at 26 hotels in and around downtown Chicago, fighting back against poverty wages, grueling working conditions, and inadequate benefits. As has increasingly become the norm in the auto industry, hotel workers frequently suffer temporary employment and the lack of job security, with many hotel workers losing their health insurance over the slower tourist season in the winter months.

The growth of opposition among hotel workers, as well as other workers in the United States and internationally, after decades of attacks on their living standards, raises the need for joint struggles of the working class, linking up hotel workers, autoworkers, steelworkers, teachers, UPS workers and others.

While a united struggle is urgently necessary, the UNITE HERE union, which has close ties to the Democratic Party, is doing everything possible to prevent the strike from expanding, refusing to call out the rest of the 15,000 hospitality and service workers it represents in the Chicago area. Instead, the union has carried out closed-door negotiations, keeping workers in the dark in order to pave the way for another concessions deal.

Alex, a temporary part-time (TPT) worker leaving at the end of his shift at Chicago Assembly, said, “I heard the hotels are trying to replace the hotel workers. That’s just not right. Their union probably doesn’t do anything for them just like the UAW here. They want

to keep the workers hungry and starving.

“I say, keep the fight alive!” he said, encouraging the hotel workers. “If they pick anyone up from the street to do their job, it shows what a dirty business this is. That’s not how things should be. It may take time, but I really hope they win. It would be also nice if we fought together. It’s getting worse and worse for everyone. Our strength is in our numbers.”

Charlene, a former TPT who was recently converted to full-time, sat in her car in the 85-degree Fahrenheit heat waiting to begin her shift. “I support the hotel workers,” she said. “They work hard just like us, they should receive better benefits—wages, healthcare, and everything it takes to live today. They can’t survive on \$12 an hour in Chicago. They deserve much, much more. The rent is high, gas goes up and down, food is getting more expensive, childcare is more expensive. Their pay rate should go up as well.

“We also deserve more money just like them. The two-tier system we have should go away. We do the same work. Some of us at the bottom of the totem pole do more work than those at the top. There should be no tiers.”

An autoworker going home said he worked at the Chicago hotel industry previously and supported their strike. Like hotel workers, many autoworkers are also forced by low wages to work multiple jobs, including driving their cars for Uber or Lyft. One autoworker took off his dusty blue overalls to reveal his nursing scrubs, a second job he was rushing to in order to pay off his student loan bills. Others at the Chicago Assembly Plant have previously worked at places like United Parcel Services, which chiefly relies on high-turnover and part-time employees who are young and

highly exploited.

Charlene, another Ford worker, spoke about the United Auto Workers corruption scandal and the millions in bribes paid to the UAW bargainers to sign pro-company deals. “We’re getting ready for another contract in 2019. So, they just take bribes and they screw us over. Just like the hotel workers—the union heads just want to load their pockets.”

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While bureaucrats in the UAW get six-figure salaries, workers are forced to work in broken-down plants like Chicago Assembly, Ford’s oldest plant in continuous operation. Workers frequently complain of water leaks, holes, rats, cockroaches, broken elevators, extreme heat in the summer, cold in the winter, and dangerous accidents. One worker was crushed to death two years ago when a wall collapsed.

“It’s hell in the factory here,” Charlene said. “You’re constantly working ‘til you’re beat. It’s rough. They bring you water when they feel like it. When you feel overwhelmed on the line, there needs to be more help. Instead of team leaders sending people home, we should get more people going up and down the line giving us relief.

“They should end the TPT stuff too,” she said, referring to the use of the highly exploited temporary part-time workers who have no rights. “If you’re doing full-time hours, they’re just putting categories on us so you don’t get the benefits of a full-time employee.

“The union doesn’t do anything for us. Meanwhile, the CEO and Ford make a lot of profits. The rich keep taking and taking from us,” she said. “The same thing happens for the hotel worker. We’re the ones that keep the CEOs rich. They should compensate us, but they won’t unless we join our struggles together. That’s the only thing we can do. We have to fight together.”



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