

The global struggle of autoworkers

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Over the last several days, tens of thousands of workers in the global auto industry have been engaged in a wave of powerful strikes against low-wages and sweatshop conditions.

Last Thursday, an estimated 13,000 autoworkers launched a one-week strike at a German-owned Audi assembly and engine plant in the Hungarian city of Győr. Workers at the plant produce 100,000 sedans, luxury sports cars and sports utility vehicles each year, along with gasoline, diesel and electric motors for Audi and other brands owned by the Volkswagen Group, the world's largest automaker.

A Hungarian Audi worker earns around 1,000 euros (US \$1,140) per month, about a third of his German counterpart, although living costs are comparable with Western Europe. The workers, who also earn considerably less than their Eastern European counterparts in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, are demanding an 18 percent wage increase and at least one full weekend off each month.

The strike coincides with a wave of mass protests against the passage of a hated overtime law by the right-wing government of Prime Minister Victor Orbán that allows companies to press employees to work the equivalent of six days a week on average. The measure, popularly dubbed as the “slave law,” is also known as “Lex Audi, Mercedes or BMW” because it was pushed by foreign automakers, the largest investors in Hungary.

The Hungarian strike follows walkouts by VW workers in Slovakia and Fiat Chrysler workers in Serbia in the summer of 2017 and by Ford workers in Craiova, Romania, just over a year ago. Czech workers at Skoda, VW Group's highly profitable low-cost brand, are also preparing to strike next month over wages.

These struggles come as workers in Mexico are spearheading what is developing into an international

struggle by auto and auto parts workers. Over the last two weeks, up to 70,000 workers at the so-called *maquiladora* plants have conducted a series of wildcat strikes in Matamoros, just across the US-Mexican border from Brownsville, Texas.

The workers are paid as little as 75 cents an hour to produce parts for the auto industry and other industries. They are demanding a 20 percent raise and a \$1,700 bonus. Their action has already cut off the export of critical parts across the border and caused the slowdown of production at Ford and GM assembly plants in Michigan, Ontario, Canada and other locations.

Among the companies being struck by workers are Auburn Hills, Michigan-based Dura Automotive, owned by former Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs investment banker Lynn Tilton, whose net worth is \$830 million. Other top auto suppliers in Matamoros include Delphi, the former parts division of GM, Johnson Controls and Canada-based Magna.

While the Trump administration wants to build a wall on the US-Mexico border and is witch-hunting migrants from Mexico and Central America, with Democrats proclaiming their commitment to “border security,” US-based corporations have no problem moving their goods back-and-forth across the border. The “Brownsville-Matamoros Borderplex” free trade zone has four international bridges and one international rail crossing, which handled more than \$7 billion worth of machinery, parts and assembled vehicles for the auto and other industries in 2018.

The courageous Matamoros workers have formed strike committees in opposition to the company unions, which have enforced poverty wages and slave-labor conditions. They have marched to the US border to appeal to workers in the US to unite in their struggle. In the face of the media blackout, the WSWWS has provided a voice and perspective for the striking Mexican

workers.

Their struggle has inspired autoworkers in the US. In an email to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, a worker at Fiat Chrysler's Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio, wrote: "The situation in Mexico was our call to action. We are working under a contract that isn't worth the paper it's written on. The corruption at the top of our [union] leadership directly ties into this rotten contract they sold us. We should be in the streets here ... Please tell our brothers and sisters in Mexico, how very proud [we are] of them. They are true heroes! I wish I could have met them at the border to join their demonstration. We are with them in spirit and hope they remain strong! Gracias!"

The strivings of workers in the US, Canada and Mexico to unite cuts across the reactionary nationalist campaign of the UAW and its Canadian counterpart, Unifor. As the Matamoros workers were marching to the border, Unifor president Jerry Dias called for a boycott of "Mexican-made" cars.

There is no such thing as a Mexican-made car, any more than there is an American- or Canadian-made car. A modern vehicle is made up of 30,000 parts, produced and assembled by workers in dozens of countries, not to mention workers who mined and processed the raw materials from around the world. Transnational corporations exploit the labor power of workers in dozens of countries to produce a single commodity and shift production around the world in search of the highest rate of profit.

Nationalism has long been peddled by the unions to cover up their own collaboration with the auto bosses to destroy the jobs and living standards of workers, while the union executives receive a portion of the additional profits extracted from workers in the form of bribes and money funneled through various corporatist labor-management schemes.

The UAW and Unifor are enforcing the blackout of the Matamoros struggle by the news media out of fear that workers in the US and Canada will also rebel against the corporate-controlled unions and unify with workers around the world in a common fight against the global auto companies and the capitalist system.

This is exactly what must be done. The WSWS calls on all workers and young people to attend and support the February 9 demonstration at the General Motors headquarters building in Detroit to fight against the

global automaker's planned shutdown of five factories in the US and Canada and the elimination of the jobs of nearly 15,000 production and salaried workers.

The demonstration has been called by the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees, which was founded at the December 9 emergency meeting against the closures that was sponsored by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party.

That meeting unanimously passed a resolution to fight for the building of rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW and Unifor, to "establish lines of communication and collaboration with all workers—including auto parts workers, teachers, Amazon workers, service workers and others—and fight for the unity of American workers with our class brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico and the rest of the world."

The objective impulse of the struggles of auto workers, teachers and other workers throughout the world is toward a general strike, drawing together all sections of the working class. This objective movement must be consciously developed and organized into a political struggle for workers power and the socialist reorganization of world economy.



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