

The program and strategy to defend jobs

Joseph Kishore
1 February 2019

On February 9, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* and the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees are holding a demonstration outside General Motors headquarters in Detroit, Michigan.

The demonstration is the first organized expression of rank-and-file opposition to GM's plans to close five plants in the US and Canada, which will have devastating consequences for thousands of workers, their families and the communities in which the plants are located, including Hamtramck, Michigan; Lordstown, Ohio; and Oshawa, Ontario.

The demonstration is based on a clear program and strategy. It is not an appeal to GM and its corporate executives, but a call for workers to express their strength and their determination to fight through the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporate-controlled unions, run by thoroughly corrupt and privileged executives.

It will demand an immediate halt to all plant closures, the abolition of the two-tier wage and benefit system, the transformation of all temporary workers into full-timers, and the rehiring of all laid-off and victimized workers. In opposition to the shop floor dictatorship of corporate management, it will fight for industrial democracy, workers' control of production and the transformation of the giant auto companies into public utilities, run on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The demonstration is being held under conditions of growing class struggle in the United States and around the world. The capitalist elites, torn by internal factional and geopolitical conflicts, are united in their offensive against the working class, through whose exploitation they have amassed unprecedented fortunes. All over the world, the capitalists are engaged in a global restructuring of the auto industry as the spearhead of a further redistribution of wealth from the

working class to the rich.

The social counterrevolution of the ruling class is encountering growing resistance. In the days following the initial announcement of the demonstration, tens of thousands of workers in Matamoros, Mexico, on the US-Mexico border, launched a wildcat strike. Workers formed independent organizations and marched under the banner, "The union and the company kill the working class." The strike, which threatens to shut down production in the North American auto industry, has demonstrated the common class interests of workers in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Terrified of the prospect of a united struggle of workers across the US-Mexico border, the corporate media and trade unions completely blacked out reporting on the strike in Matamoros. US auto workers, informed of the struggle through the *World Socialist Web Site*, responded with strong support for a joint offensive against the auto companies. "We are being called to action by our brothers and sisters around the world to join this fight," a worker at the Toledo Jeep Assembly Plant wrote in to the WSWs.

The first month of 2019 has seen a series of major class struggles in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, including a strike by 13,000 autoworkers in Hungary, hundreds of thousands of teachers and other government workers in Tamil Nadu, India, and mass protests of workers in Sudan and Zimbabwe. In France, the "yellow vest" demonstrators have been joined by "red pen" protests of teachers against the deplorable state of public education.

In the United States, a strike by 33,000 teachers in Los Angeles is being followed by a new wave of teacher unrest. A strike authorization vote will be completed today in Oakland, California, where teachers have engaged in a series of wildcat sickouts against plans to close a third of the city's public schools. Teachers in Denver, Colorado have approved strike

action for the first time in a quarter of a century, while teachers in Virginia staged a mass demonstration at the state capital on Monday.

The February 9 demonstration is based on the understanding that there can be no defense of jobs except through the independent organization of the working class. As the Steering Committee statement calling for the demonstration declares, the United Auto Workers in the US and Unifor in Canada “are businesses—cheap-labor contractors and an industrial police force, controlled by executives that are in the top 3 percent of income earners.”

The UAW and Unifor, which have collaborated with the auto companies for decades in destroying jobs and attacking the wages and conditions of workers, are doing nothing to stop the plant closures. In the face of the global auto jobs massacre, the unions are not organizing a single demonstration, let alone a strike.

The UAW this week released a pathetic video highlighting the concessions the union rammed through in 2009 as part of the Obama administration’s restructuring of the auto industry—the halving of wages for new-hires, an end to income security for laid-off workers and the elimination of dental and vision coverage for retirees. “We invested in you,” the UAW implores GM, “now it is your turn to invest in us.” A string of appeals from UAW officials for GM to “invest in us” are intended to serve no other purpose than to spread demoralization.

In fact, the UAW “invested in GM” by becoming a major stockholder in the company, with a vested interest in increasing the exploitation of autoworkers, which they have done in a series of concessions contracts pushed through over mass opposition at GM and the other auto companies. The corruption scandal that erupted last year exposed the fact that corporate executives “invested in the UAW” through direct payouts in exchange for the UAW performing its assigned role.

In the Los Angeles teachers strike, the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and its parent organizations, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, last month pushed through a rotten agreement to shut down the struggle in the most blatantly undemocratic manner possible. After six days on the picket lines, the UTLA gave teachers only a few hours to review the sellout

deal it reached behind closed doors with the school board and Democratic politicians before voting on the agreement.

In both the yellow vest protests in France and the strikes in Mexico, the endurance of the struggle has come from the fact that workers organized independently of the trade unions.

The objective impulse of the struggles of workers in the United States and around the world is toward a political general strike, drawing together all sections of the working class in a fight for power and against the capitalist system. It is bringing workers into conflict with the nationalist and pro-corporate trade unions, controlled by privileged executives whose interests are directly opposed to those of the workers they claim to represent.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality party will do everything in our power to promote and assist in the development and unification of the struggles of workers in the United States and all over the world, connecting the growth of the class struggle to a revolutionary socialist political perspective and program. We call on all workers and young people to attend the February 9 demonstration and send in your messages of support.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact