

With contract deadline approaching, Michigan auto parts workers vote by 97 percent to strike global parts maker

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Workers at the Faurecia auto parts plant in Saline, Michigan, 45 miles west of Detroit, voted by 97 percent in favor of strike action to reverse the pattern of pay cuts and concessions on medical benefits, working conditions and safety that have long dominated the auto parts industry. The contract for 1,100 hourly workers at the plant expires on May 31.

The overwhelming strike vote on May 5 is a rebuke to the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, which has colluded with the Big Three automakers—General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler—as they used spin-offs, corporate bankruptcies and takeovers to attack workers and drastically lower the costs of parts for their assembly plants.

The vote occurs less than four months before contracts expire for 155,000 Big Three workers in mid-September. With the exposure of Fiat Chrysler's bribing of the UAW, workers are more determined than ever to overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions, including the imposition of two-tier wages and vast expansion of temporary part-time employees who pay union dues but have no rights.

The Saline plant, which employs around 1,100 hourly workers, used to be owned by Ford and then its Visteon parts spin-off before declaring bankruptcy in 2009 to gut the pay and pensions of the former Ford workers. While the factory produces parts for a number of automakers, it is primarily focused on supplying Ford's North American assembly operations with trim pieces, instrument panels, door panels, consoles, and other internal plastic parts.

Faurecia, a giant French-owned multinational, took over the plant in 2012. It produces seating, interiors, electronics and emission controls from Mexico to

China and Brazil to Japan and South Korea and specializes in plant takeovers wherever investors see a chance to squeeze increased profits from the workforce.

The company's annual financial report makes the motives for its corporate model crystal clear. Global sales of €17.5 billion (\$1.9 billion) last year were up 7 percent against those of 2017. Net income increased by a whopping 17 percent to €701 million (\$785 million), which represents Earnings Per Share of €5.11 (\$5.72). Managers proposed a dividend payout to their wealthy shareholders of €1.25 (\$1.40) per share, or 24 percent of earnings, for a net increase of 14 percent against a year ago.

In the face of universal unrest on the part of the workforce, the local executive of the scandal-ridden UAW tried to get ahead of the opposition by feigning support for the workers. "Hopefully this is a sign from the membership that they stand unified and had enough with concessions and job loss," Local 892 officials posted on Facebook. They continue, "The ball is now in the UAW international's hands," adding, "Does the Solidarity House stand unified in solidarity with its members or Wall Street?"

The local officials are only trying to cover their own hides. They know the answer is Wall Street, and that the UAW will do everything to prevent a strike that would quickly disrupt production at Ford and inspire Big Three autoworkers to take joint action.

Faurecia workers have not forgotten how the UAW and the company blocked a strike in 2015, nor how the deal struck by the two parties was soon breached, with Faurecia revoking the workers' Blue Cross/Blue Shield health insurance with not the slightest resistance from the union.

“I want better insurance in this upcoming contract,” said Wanda, a worker at the plant. “With the insurance we have now, we have to call in before it pays for anything. We didn't have to go through that previously with Blue Cross. But they took that away from us.”

This month's contract negotiations take place in the wake of the conviction of UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell on charges of asking for and accepting tens of thousands of dollars in bribes during the 2015 contract “negotiations” between Fiat Chrysler and the UAW. The lessons of the Jewell scandal are clear to Faurecia workers.

“I don't think the UAW should negotiate for us, period,” Wanda said. “Because they're in bed with the company. They're not trying to help us; they're trying to help themselves.”

Another worker agreed. “The way everything operates, the UAW has got to have something worked out with the higher-ups of the company.”

“The workers are strong, but the workers and the union right now are two different things,” Wanda added.

Workers at the French-owned conglomerate also rejected the endless promotion of nationalism by the UAW, the Trump administration and the Democrats, and their claims that foreign workers—not the capitalist exploiters—are to blame for low wages and vanishing jobs throughout the auto industry.

“It has nothing to do with the Mexican workers,” Wanda continued. “They're just like us. They want a good job. They want to work hard. What's the problem with them working hard? I have no problem with anybody of any color or nationality. We all bleed red.”

Workers in Matamoros, Mexico earlier this year rebelled against the company-controlled unions and organized independent strike committees to fight sweatshop conditions and poverty wages in the maquiladora plants. They also marched to the US border across from Brownsville, Texas to call for the support of American workers.

Wanda envisions a unified movement of the working class, one that does not leave workers isolated in their separate plants. “The unions are not trying to help us like they should be,” she said. “When one union goes on strike, we are all supposed to go on strike. We are supposed to stick together as brothers and sisters worldwide. It doesn't matter where we are located, we

need to stick together as one.”

The UAW is not “negotiating” a contract at Faurecia but conspiring with the corporation to increase the exploitation of Faurecia workers and lower labor costs even further, thereby setting a precedent to attack all autoworkers. That is why the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges Faurecia workers to form independent rank-and-file committees, to take the negotiations and struggle out of the hands of the corrupt UAW. These committees must prepare workers to strike when the contract expires and to reach out to all autoworkers to prepare a common fight.



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