

“All the companies should go on strike together”

Faurecia auto parts workers await contract expiration in Saline, Michigan

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The contract expires tonight at midnight for 1,400 workers at an auto parts plant in Saline, Michigan owned by French conglomerate Faurecia. Workers at the factory, located 45 miles west of Detroit, voted in early May by 97 percent to authorize strike action at the plant, which produces door panels, consoles, instrument panels and other internal plastic parts for Ford and other automakers.

The workers are determined to reverse a pattern of union-sanctioned cuts in pay and medical benefits, and the destruction of working conditions and safety dating back more than two decades. Many workers were forced to accept the sub-standard wages after losing jobs at Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler, while younger workers had no choice due to the high rates of unemployment in Detroit and its environs.

The conditions are horrific: roof leaks cause untold hazards, falls and sprains. And workers report blood clots, respiratory disorders and other disabilities from chemical exposure in the plant, among other serious hazards.

The overwhelming strike vote May 5 represented a forceful repudiation of the United Auto Workers, which has stood by and done nothing as the workforce suffered through the spin off from Ford Motor Company, the bankruptcy of Visteon and the takeover by their current employer. Every step of the way has been marked by the conspiracy of the global auto giants in collusion with corrupt unions, as a means of forcing workers to pay for the spreading crisis of world capitalism through concessions, pay cuts, unsafe conditions and lost pensions.

Faurecia employs the same tactics against all layers of its global workforce of 100,000 in France, Germany, the UK, the Czech Republic, Brazil and China. The cuts have been the source of record profits in the sector for a number of years. At Faurecia, global sales of \$1.9 billion

last year were up 7 percent against those of 2017 and net income increased by a whopping 17 percent to \$785 million.

This contract falls just three and a half months before contracts expire for 155,000 workers at the Big Three in mid-September. Many workers recognize the powerful opportunity this provides for united struggle.

But the last thing that the union wants is a challenge to the program of pay cuts and other concessions in the increasingly integrated global workforce on the eve of the Big Three contract expiration, which will occur in mid-September. The UAW is dead set against any struggle that might jeopardize their sweetheart arrangements with the companies.

The corruption scandal in federal court in which UAW vice presidents and head negotiators at Fiat Chrysler were convicted of taking more than \$1 million in bribes to provide pro-company contracts is just the tip of the iceberg. During the massive restructuring under the Obama administration in 2009, UAW executives received control of more than a billion dollars in assets that were designated to cover medical insurance benefits for retirees.

The takeover of the plant in 2012 by the French multinational gives the lie to the bankrupt nationalism of the UAW and its counterparts in every other country. Workers in France, Mexico, China, Brazil, Japan and South Korea, to name only a few, face the same attacks and manipulate the same technology every day that enables the company to function globally. Still the unions and bourgeois political parties in every country, like the Democrats and Republicans, spout nationalism and prepare trade war and world war.

Workers have the technical knowledge and resources to unite their struggles across national borders. But in order

to do so, they must build independent organizations, rank and file committees in factories everywhere, in order to break the grip of the unions and the capitalist political parties they support and take the struggle into their own hands.

Faurecia workers have not forgotten that the UAW sabotaged the movement for strike action in 2015. As soon as the danger passed, the company, with union collusion, terminated Blue Cross/Blue Shield health insurance and forced workers into the substandard program at Aetna which they have been saddled with ever since.

The company operates facilities nearby in Auburn Hills, Fraser, Sterling Heights and Taylor, Michigan. Internet technology makes communication, cooperation and united action by workers everywhere, not only possible, but a necessity. The union seeks to divide workers between countries, between factories and even within factories by accepting different pay grades and benefit packages as well as other types of favoritism.

At Saline the union has co-opted a few workers onto the so-called “bargaining committee” to rubber-stamp an agreement which was prepared behind closed doors by the international union at Solidarity House.

Last winter, workers in Matamoros, Mexico shouted down their union executive and established rank-and-file committees to spread their struggle from factory to factory to regain lost wages and bonuses. They marched to the border of Brownsville, Texas, with banners and bull horns to call for support from coworkers on the US side. “Gringos, wake up,” they shouted— a demand which still strikes fear into the hearts of those in corporate boardrooms and capitalist exploiters everywhere.

The media, the unions and political parties on both sides of the border, along with their pseudo-left cheerleaders did everything in their power to isolate that struggle. But despite that it still won important gains. The lesson is: we must lose no time in breaking out of the straitjacket imposed by the UAW.

Like a lot of workers we have spoken with, Joan who works full time for \$15.00 per hour in a wage progression that tops out at \$17.50 is very suspicious of the UAW. “They have not told us anything,” she said.

“It is crazy,” she continued. “The contract is expiring. We should know something. They have not scheduled a vote or anything. I am not happy.

“If they only offer us 3 percent, I would rather just shut them down and strike. They keep on cutting our hours. We need to hit them hard.” The wages are so low that

many workers cannot make ends meet without overtime. And the company has cut all overtime for the last three months in a move to prevent a strike. But the strategy may have back-fired.

“We are scheduled for 12 hours, four days a week, and they keep cutting us back. We don’t get any overtime. I am ready to strike,” declared Joan. “We have not worked a full 48 hours in the last two to three months.

“Our union is in bed with the company. We should not be leaving early every day. The union is not for us. If they were, they would have never given up our Blue Cross insurance.

“We pay \$25 per week for Aetna insurance which is not worth a shit. They only fill certain prescriptions. And you have to call them to get permission to fill those.

“There is a lot of corruption throughout the union. Every month they take their money out of our check and it is never the same amount.

“A lot of workers have their backs messed up because of the work we do. They work you like a slave in there. And you have nothing to show for it. That is the crazy part.”

When we discussed the struggle in Matamoros she became even more agitated. “The union did not tell us that Flat Rock was shut down because of the strike in Mexico,” she said. “We should have joined with them and all gone on strike. All the companies should go on strike together!”

She continued, putting her finger on the UAW strategy of isolating sections of workers that enter into struggle: “That is the problem. We are not sticking together. And that does nothing but hurt us more.”

David, who also works at the plant, added, “The UAW won’t tell us anything. They sent a letter to our local’s Facebook page stating that they were still ‘negotiating.’

“We have constant turnover because the management treats the employees so badly.

We need to eliminate the points system. If you go to the hospital, you get a point. They count sick days and vacation days against us. I think we have the worst conditions in the industry. All the concessions we’ve taken: we want all that back pay.”



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