

Saline, Michigan Faurecia workers outraged after UAW shuts down their strike

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Workers at the Faurecia auto parts plant in Saline, Michigan southwest of Detroit are outraged over the unilateral decision by the United Auto Workers to shut down their strike just hours after it began early Friday morning.

The walkout had the potential to quickly shut down auto assembly operations nationwide at the Detroit automakers as well as electric vehicle maker Tesla. It demonstrated the immense social power of the working class after decades in which the class struggle has been suppressed.

The four-year contract covering the 1,900 workers at Faurecia in Saline expired June 1, but the UAW refused to call a strike at that time, despite a 97 percent vote in favor of strike authorization. Instead, the UAW dragged out negotiations, allowing Faurecia more time to prepare.

This is the latest in a series of actions by the UAW demonstrating once again that this is a compliant tool of management. It follows the decision by the UAW to end a six-week strike by nurses at Mercy Health St Vincent Medical Center in Toledo, Ohio, ordering a return to work over the mass opposition by workers. Nurses subsequently rejected the UAW-backed contract.

Any contract that comes out of this process can only be a betrayal. Workers must prepare to reject this sellout and to resume their struggle on the widest possible basis, winning support from workers at the major auto companies and parts suppliers.

The most important practical step is the election of a rank-and-file factory committee to take the contract fight out of the hands of the UAW strikebreakers.

Workers must advance their own demands, corresponding to their needs, not the profit requirements of stockholders. This should include

workers' control over health and safety, the transformation of all part-time workers into permanent employees and a 40 percent pay increase to compensate for past concessions.

The strike by Faurecia workers was the first auto strike since a walkout by workers at Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan in 2015, which was also shut down by the UAW within hours. Because of the just-in-time inventory system, a disruption anywhere in the supply chain can cause a chain reaction of production shutdowns.

Moreover, the UAW fears that a successful fight by Faurecia workers to beat back concessions would reverberate throughout the auto industry, increasing the resolve of workers at the Detroit-based automakers, whose contracts expire in September, to press for the restoration of lost concessions, including the elimination of low-paid part-time and contract work.

GM is demanding that the UAW impose major new concessions in 2019, including an expansion of low-paid contract workers and increases in out-of-pocket health care costs. The UAW and the Detroit automakers are scheming to use the threat of plant shutdowns as a club to force through a new round of deep cuts.

To describe what the UAW is doing as "contract negotiations" is a misnomer. Rather, the UAW is engaged in a conspiracy. Management and the UAW are working to force through concessions agreements in the face of the overwhelming sentiment of workers for a fight.

Shane, a former Faurecia worker, spoke out in support of the workers at the Saline plant via Facebook.

"I would say to continue to fight the good fight," he said. He warned, "Please do not settle for whatever they offer you. You deserve a better way of life, a better quality of life for yourselves and your families. It

may be a struggle but without struggle there is no progress. True progress will outlast a temporary gain. So continue to stand together in solidarity and be united!”

Faurecia workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* as the UAW dismantled picket lines Friday morning emphasized the horrific working conditions at the factory, where three workers died in the space of just one year.

They told the WSWS that the only concrete “gain” the UAW could point to was the payment of a \$2,500 bonus in two installments, one now and another in January.

“By the time January comes, half the people will be fired and gone,” said Clare, noting management’s highly punitive disciplinary system, where workers are penalized for taking medical leave or even holidays.

Her friend added, “A lot of people are about to be fired, because they are at 6-8 points. So you won’t even see that \$1,000 in January. They know what they are doing. Eight points is all you get. There is no family time; even if you get pulled out by the EMS [emergency medical services], that’s a point.”

Clare noted, “Even if EMS goes out on the floor and gets you, that’s a point for me. That goes toward my eight points.” Her friend added, “She’s getting a point, and not only is she getting a point, she is paying for the paramedics.

“Yes,” Clare agreed, “I am going to get that bill. That’s \$500.”

Workers at Faurecia were prepared for a fight after taking a \$1 per hour pay cut four years ago and losing their Blue Cross Blue Shield health coverage. Workers earn little more than poverty wages at the highly profitable French-based auto parts manufacturer, which assembles door parts and other interior components for Ford and other automakers, including Tesla.

David, who has worked at the plant for one year and makes \$13 an hour assembling doors, spoke to the WSWS Friday morning after the UAW called off the strike.

“I have no clue what is going on,” he said. “I’m trying to figure it out. I don’t know what they agreed on. We are basically in the dark.

“The first thing we need is more money. The cost of living is up. People have kids. They cut our overtime, and right now I am working only 40 hours a week.

“We need better benefits, mainly health insurance. We could also use life insurance.”

Ben has worked at the plant since 2012. “I have been doing the math about the extension of the contract so close to changeover, and it seems they want to save the company money.

“We don’t know what we’re striking for. They have laid off people in the Mustang area. In two departments they are getting rid of machinery.”

Clare said, “If it was up to us, we would have been on strike June 1 because we didn’t agree to their [terms] June 1. But they didn’t say anything to us. Ninety-seven percent voted to go on strike; we didn’t go on strike.”

She agreed with uniting all autoworkers in a common fight. “There were Ford workers out here this morning supporting us. They said they were not bringing anything to our plant and they are not taking anything out of our plant because they are coming right behind us. They are trying to take care of us before the Big Three. We really start off for the Big Three.”

The brutal conditions facing workers at Faurecia are typical of what workers face in the auto parts sector. Once paying wages comparable to those at auto assembly plants, the auto parts makers, with the assistance of the UAW, have waged a decades-long drive to slash costs in the parts industry.

A fightback is required, uniting auto workers with all workers throughout the United States and internationally! We urge Faurecia workers to read the WSWS statement, “Autoworkers must take contract fight into their own hands!” and participate in the call in meeting set for June 27 on the upcoming auto contract fight.



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