

“The cost of living is constantly going up while the chance to live is going down”

Autoworkers vote overwhelmingly for strike at Ford, GM, and Chrysler plants

Jerry White
28 August 2019

Autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler’s Warren Truck assembly plant in suburban Detroit moved quickly in and out of the local United Auto Workers union hall Tuesday, casting ballots to authorize the UAW to call a strike when their four-year labor agreement expires at midnight on Saturday, September 14.

When asked why they were voting to strike, they shouted comments to WSWs reporters like, “They owe us,” and, “We’re not going to work for BS anymore.”

Many who stopped to take copies of the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* explained that autoworkers have suffered more than a decade of freezes in real wages and other concessions while Fiat Chrysler, General Motors and Ford have made record profits.

While voting to authorize a strike, workers have no confidence in the UAW, which has colluded with management for decades and has accepted millions in bribes for signing pro-company contracts.

The results of the voting thus far at several large factories show near unanimous support for strike action. These include Fiat-Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly (96 percent in favor), Trenton Engine (91 percent) and Belvidere Assembly (94 percent); GM’s Spring Hill, Tennessee, assembly plant (99 percent), Tonawanda Powertrain (98 percent), Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly (96 percent); and Ford’s Cleveland Engine (93 percent).

Voting is continuing today at several large factories, including Ford’s Louisville plants, which employ 12,000 workers. The vote totals are expected to be released by the end of the week.

The battles lines are already clear. Workers are

determined to recoup years of UAW-backed concessions. The companies want to impose sharp increases in medical co-pays and deductibles, expand the number of low-paid temporary and contract workers and have a free hand to continue plant closings and mass layoffs.

With signs of another global slowdown, the auto companies are engaged in a global restructuring to slash jobs and labor costs and position themselves to dominate the new electric, ride-sharing and autonomous technologies.

A young worker with two years in the plant told the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*, “I saw that the AT&T workers went out on strike. So did the Faurecia auto parts workers. The more people, the better. Let’s fight too,” he said, referring to the 158,000 GM, Ford and FCA autoworkers. “This two-tier system has to go, and all new people should be treated equally.”

On Tuesday, the Communication Workers of America (CWA) indicated that it would send striking AT&T workers back to work this morning. Among the principal considerations of the union is the fear that a lengthy and determined struggle by telecommunications workers will encourage autoworkers to fight back against the corporate-union conspiracy.

Pointing to the exposure of the massive bribe-taking scandal, the worker added, “I don’t like the corruption. How are they supposed to bargain for us when they are taking bribes?”

Linda, a young temporary part-time worker, said, “The companies are making billions and billions. Why

can't they pay us a decent wage? Fiat Chrysler has enough money to hire 4,900 new workers in Detroit, so they have enough money to roll us over to full-time jobs."

The contract is "all about money," another worker said, "But they don't give a damn about the workers who come in every day and bust their butts."

Among the minority who voted against authorizing the UAW to call a strike were many workers who did so because they don't trust anything the UAW does. The UAW has made no indication of what it would supposedly be fighting for and has released no demands. This is because it has none, other than to try to find some way to force workers to accept the concessions demanded by the companies.

"They're telling us to vote unanimously for a strike, but they haven't said a word about what we would be striking for," one worker said. "They don't communicate with workers unless it's something management wants. If they want us to do mandatory overtime, believe me, the UAW will have leaflets plastered all over the factory.

"After I hired in it took three to four years to get basic dental and vision insurance. They say they want you to build a safe car, but they don't care whether you can see to build the product.

Pointing out that workers at his plant cannot afford the Dodge Ram pickup trucks they build, he said, "The cost of living is constantly going up while the chance to live is going down."

Ricky, a veteran worker with 23 years at the plant, said, "We knew the UAW was selling us out, but we didn't know at the time how much the company was paying to buy off [former top UAW-Chrysler negotiators] General Holiefield and Norwood Jewell. The UAW pretends to be fighting the company when they are in bed with it. It's the same way with the Democrats and Republicans, they fight each other but they come together to screw us.

"[Former FCA CEO] Sergio Marchionne came here, and he said American workers are making too much money," Ricky said.

This reporter pointed out that FCA had closed a plant in Sicily, Italy, and was putting workers at its flagship factory in Turin on short workweeks, even as it was expanding in Detroit because labor was cheaper. The worker said, "People need to understand that. But the

UAW won't tell them, and the news is controlled by the corporations."

Ricky said he had learned about the strikes earlier this year of Mexican maquiladora workers from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, and that he agreed with the fight to unify autoworkers internationally against the global assault on jobs and living standards.

"The young workers want a better life. That's why we all came to work here. Now the young generation is going to have fight too," he concluded.

Among workers there is widespread support for the call by the *Autoworker Newsletter* to build rank-and-file factory committees to take the conduct of the contract fight out of the hands of the bribed UAW.

The auto companies and the UAW have already drawn up the contracts, and the ongoing "negotiations" are only discussions on how best to ram it past a workforce that is determined to fight for substantial improvements.

That is why workers must reject the UAW bargaining committee and establish rank-and-file factory committees, made up of the most militant and trusted workers, to fight for a series of non-negotiable demands, including stopping all plant closings, rehiring all laid off and victimized workers, a 40 percent pay increase, the abolition of the two-tier system and the conversion of all temporary and contract workers into full-timers.

To oppose all backroom deals, these committees must demand that all talks be live-streamed.

To fight for these demands, autoworkers should prepare to launch a nation-wide strike to shut down the auto and auto parts industry and reach out to their class brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada and across the globe to launch cross-border strikes and unified actions.

Autoworkers should unite with AT&T workers, teachers, Amazon workers and every other section of the working class to conduct an industrial and political offensive against the corporate and financial elite and the two big business parties that serve them.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact