

Australian teachers and educators back US autoworkers' fight

Our reporters
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Several Australian teachers and public school staff recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* to voice their solidarity with the looming struggle for decent wages and conditions of 155,000 American car workers employed by General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

Labour agreements covering the US auto workforce are now expiring. Representatives of the transnational corporations are working in closed-door meetings with United Auto Workers union bureaucrats to devise new contracts involving entrenched multi-tier wage levels and more onerous productivity give-aways.

In Australia, the trade unions covering car workers enforced concession after concession, insisting that this was the only “realistic” way to protect jobs, until in 2016–2017 the remaining car companies—Ford, Toyota, and GM-Holden—shut down all production. High unemployment is blighting working-class communities, as promised company-union “retraining” schemes produced little or nothing for sacked assembly line workers.

“I think the huge vote of autoworkers for strike action is very important,” said **Mandy**, a public primary school teacher and member of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE). “The situation where unions have let workers down has been going on too long, with lots of corruption by the union leaders. It’s terrible. Autoworkers need to take action outside the unions.”

Mandy also spoke about the recent upsurge of public school teachers’ struggles in the US. “Teachers in America have been striking for two years,” she said. “Initially in West Virginia, they organised outside the unions; they started it independently, but then the unions took over and unfortunately teachers went back to work and were unable to win their demands. Once the union got involved, they sold the teachers out. That is the lesson for the autoworkers—to continue on their

own and not trust the unions.

“The yearly wage of the head of the US teachers’ union is over half a million dollars. This is terrible when teachers themselves have appalling wages and have to go out and get a second job to survive and support their families. The union leaders do nothing for their members yet live the high life.”

She concluded: “When teachers from my school in Victoria, Australia, sent support to teachers in West Virginia, during their strike, they were pleased and surprised at such an outpouring of support from the other side of the world. It’s really important that we do that for the auto workers as well—for other industries and other countries. Teachers and workers face the same problems, so it is important we stand together and show our support. I grew up in an area in Melbourne where there was always a car industry but all of that been closed down. Where are the next generation of young people going to get jobs going forward?”

Sally, a secondary public school teacher, said: “The high rate of those voting for strike action shows that workers want to be pre-emptive. In the past there have been a lot of layoffs, victimisations and wage cuts in the auto industry. The evidence of union corruption will have a massive impact on the workers. They are worried about their conditions and now they know about their union’s bribery. I would want to relay to workers that they should be able to fight without their union—there is strength and power in numbers.”

Daniel, an education support staff worker, added: “The car industry made \$17 billion last year, so the workers should expect that their wages will increase. But it’s not in the nature of these companies. They are trying to get as much as they can for as little cost as possible. Many workers have little faith in the union system—it’s been shown to be in bed with

management.”

Daniel continued: “My job as a teacher’s aide does not give me enough money to live on. It’s part of a global effort by the ruling elites to squeeze as much money from the working class and supplement their own profits. I’m hoping the autoworkers continue to fight. They are dealing with bankrupt management and the fight starts by building their own committees to bypass the corrupt unions.”

Martin, a retired secondary teacher and member of the Committee for Public Education, said: “Autoworkers can’t begin the fight under this union leadership. The UAW leadership is corrupt. You can’t get any lower than taking money from bosses to sell out your members. I wouldn’t even trust them to count the votes.

“This is not an ordinary wages struggle. Given the crisis of the US economy, and the world economy, the US-China trade war is hotting up now, meaning it will immediately become a political struggle. What starts as workers’ cost of living demands will be met straight away with claims that they are being traitors to America’s economic interests.

I think the first step has to be a setting up of rank-and-file disputes committees. How they organise them, whether factory by factory, or when they first walk out the gate, I am not sure, but the committee must be open and dominated by the rank and file. The committee must be democratic and prosecute the strike. They have to organise pickets, organise funding. You can bet your bottom dollar that the UAW strike fund will not be available.”

Martin added: “Most importantly, they have to organise teams to go to all the other factories. Straight away, they’ve got to contact other car workers in Mexico and Canada and in other places that have been on strike recently. Workers must take control of the dispute.

“As the WSWS has stated, there’s no such thing as a national car. Cars are international. Bits and pieces of them are made all over the world and they’re put together, maybe in Detroit or elsewhere.

Workers have to go out immediately to widen strike action. The American car companies will straight away try to break the strike by shifting their production into Mexico, or wherever it suits them. So it will have to be international. Autoworkers can’t cop the rubbish about

defending American jobs. So many jobs have been destroyed by this collaborationist tactic of the UAW officials and the auto companies.

“The only way you can defend an American car worker’s job is to defend a Japanese car worker’s job, or a Chinese car worker’s job, or a German car worker’s job, because the companies play one section of workers against another, including American workers.”

The authors recommend:

Fearing rebellion of autoworkers against UAW, Trump holds White House meeting with General Motors CEO

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Committee for Public Education (Australia): Support the fight against GM layoffs!



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