

“They’re stealing from us, who have nothing!”

Autoworkers react to UAW betrayal of GM, Ford, Chrysler contract fight

Our reporters
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The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* encountered widespread opposition among workers to the UAW-company conspiracy in the course of campaigns at auto factories Saturday afternoon.

There was powerful sentiment for a united struggle of US autoworkers with their counterparts in Mexico, Canada and internationally. “I have been reading about the struggle of GM workers in Silao [Mexico] on your newsletter,” said a worker at the Delta Township assembly plant in Lansing, Michigan. “I would love to take joint strike action with them against General Motors. I think a lot of people would.”

“There is always the attempt to pit us against each other,” said another worker at the plant. “We have to stand together regardless of the country.”

Rosalinda, a Mexican factory worker who took part in the wildcat strike in Matamoros earlier this year, sent greetings to American autoworkers. “I wish you all the best in your fight,” she said. “Get ready, because in war there are always fallen soldiers. I was one of them, and believe me, it has not been easy going back to work because of being blacklisted after the strike. I am currently unemployed. I hope that in the struggle of my fellow workers from GM, Ford in the US and in Silao, all of their jobs will be respected and kept.”

At Ford and Fiat Chrysler plants, many workers denounced the United Auto Workers’ decision to extend their contracts indefinitely, leaving workers at General Motors, the lead bargainer in the contract talks, to fend for themselves in the event of a strike.

“What everybody’s asking is why, if we’re all supposedly in the UAW, why don’t we all strike together?” a second-tier worker at Ford Chicago Assembly said. “Why don’t we all walk together?

That’s starting to resonate with a lot of people. A lot of people are thinking that if we all go out together, they can’t beat us.”

He continued: “These last few days we’ve seen a considerable increase in union officials present. Not necessarily saying much, but observing us. The person who was handing out the brochure about a possible strike was telling everyone to not do anything unless the UAW says to.”

The UAW is terrified that it won’t be able to force through a concessions contract, he said.

“That’s exactly what people are saying. They converted a lot of TPTs [Temporary Part-Time employees] to in-progression, but what the UAW didn’t realize was that the TPTs haven’t forgotten that they were screwed for two to three years, with no signing bonuses or profit sharing. They’re not going to want to vote for whatever the union is going to propose.”

“The UAW hasn’t told us anything,” another Chicago Assembly worker said. “Many of us didn’t even know the contract had been extended. I’ve worked here for eight years. It reminds me a lot of what happened in 2015. Hiding details, keeping workers in the dark, all to ram through another bad contract.”

A TPT worker spoke to campaigners at Ford’s Dearborn Truck plant. “I’m not surprised by the corruption,” he said. “But they’re stealing from a lot of us, who have nothing basically.”

“I don’t know if people know, but a lot of TPT workers have to have a second job just to get by. It’s really hard, you know. I’m a mother of seven kids. Sometimes I just can’t believe I have to do this—but I don’t know how else to take care of my kids.

“I have two jobs. I have no idea how to make ends meet sometimes. I also would like to get my teeth fixed, but I don’t have any benefits. It’ll cost me \$300 just to get an appointment, x-rays, and all that, before they even do anything. I just can’t afford it. So all that money that’s being stolen—it just makes me so angry.”

At Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit, one worker said, “We need a new crew [in the UAW] because all of them are corrupt!”

She continued: “If GM is not able to reach a feasible contract, [GM workers] need to strike! Too many concessions have been taken. None of these companies is trying to give anything back, yet they make billions off our literal blood, sweat and tears in these plants, and it’s unacceptable.”

When asked what she thought about workers establishing rank-and-file committees, she said, “I’m for it... We have to get back to the days when the union was feared, basically.”

The UAW is continuing its information blackout past the contract expiration Saturday at midnight. It is forcing GM workers to remain on the job without a contract on Sunday and will not announce its final decision on a strike or contract extension until late Sunday morning.

“We haven’t heard anything about the contract,” a worker at GM’s Delta Township plant in Lansing said. “Every time I ask somebody, they can’t tell me anything.”

The worker described how GM uses robots and other hi-tech machines to slash labor costs. “In general assembly they have a robot that works right on the line next to the workers. They have eliminated a lot of jobs by outsourcing and introducing robots.

“We used to have a whole line as long as that building to produce the motor rail. Now it comes in already assembled from a plant in Jackson. And the shock towers—we used to build those. We used to have a lot of small containers with parts. Now we have large containers with pieces that are already assembled.”

Another Delta Township worker said, “I have heard that they are going after medical care. They have already made cuts. I had to pay \$400 for a new pair of glasses. I even have to pay extra for safety glasses because I need the progressive lenses and different frames.” He would “absolutely” support a strike against the concessions, he said.

“This is terrible,” another worker said. “[GM chief executive Mary Barra] makes over \$20 million a year. I don’t make that in 30 years!”

Another described the brutal work regime inside the plant. “I sling 10,000 pounds of steel manually in a nine-hour shift. I weigh 127 pounds. Six days a week. When they had a breakdown, we had to go on 10 hours a day for two weeks.

“Most of OSHA’s [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] regulations are unenforceable. There are no laws protecting me against that. There are no laws on the books to force companies to give us a break after four hours. I have to go for an MRI for my arms because I probably have carpal tunnel syndrome in both arms.

“There are laws that protect animals, but there are no laws protecting us.”

The worker denounced the UAW, which does nothing to protect workers against such conditions. “The UAW has become a business just like everything else,” she said.

We urge autoworkers to register for the Autoworker Newsletter online forum on Thursday, September 19, at 7: 0 0 p.m. EDT to discuss a strategy to take forward this fight: wsws.org/autocall.



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