

“The rank and file have to take control!”

Ford, Fiat-Chrysler workers call for all-out strike alongside GM workers

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At midnight Sunday, roughly 49,000 autoworkers struck at General Motors (GM), shutting down production at the largest US-based automaker.

The strike is a major episode in the resurgence of the class struggle. American autoworkers are now at the tip of the spear of a global counteroffensive by workers against poverty, inequality and job losses, encompassing not only autoworkers but teachers, public transit workers, Amazon workers and the entire working class.

The strike was called by the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the face of overwhelming opposition to rampant union corruption and its decades of colluding with management to force through concessions. UAW President Gary Jones, who faces indictment for embezzling hundreds of thousands of dollars in unions, could not show his face in public on Sunday and was not present at the press conference announcing the strike.

The UAW only called a strike after forcing GM workers to cross the picket line on Sunday against striking UAW janitors at five facilities in Michigan and Ohio.

Having been forced to call a strike, the UAW will now do everything it can to limit it from spreading to Ford and Fiat Chrysler, where the union has already signed contract extensions. The union will seek to shut the strike down at the first opportunity and force through the dictates of management, including expanding the use of temps and cuts to health care.

Autoworkers can break free from the stranglehold of the UAW by organizing rank-and-file factory committees, formed by and accountable to autoworkers themselves, to take over direction of the strike and establish lines of communication and support with the entire working class.

Autoworkers from Ford and Fiat-Chrysler spoke to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* after the UAW's announcement of a strike at GM, expressing the desire for

a broad struggle outside of the control of the corrupt union bureaucracy.

A second tier worker from the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant told the *Autoworker Newsletter*:

“Everybody should join with General Motors workers on strike. We cannot believe anything the UAW says. We haven't even seen any union reps. Workers are very upset. We are not happy about all this corruption. We don't know what could happen.”

“The rank-and-file have to take control like they did in Matamoros,” the worker said, referencing the mass movement in early 2019 when 70,000 workers shut down the auto parts industry in the Mexican border town. “We need rank-and-file committees so that we can have communication with the other plants and get ourselves organized.”

“How can the UAW executive board keep Gary Jones after he has been exposed as a criminal?” he continued. “That just shows that this whole process is illegitimate. If the union was not corrupt, the strike fund would be three times as big and all of us could be on strike right now, with decent strike pay of \$750 dollars a week.

“We need to discuss what to ask for, what we need to see in the contract, and what documents we need to see before we vote on it. Not just the highlights, but all of it, and any memorandums of understanding also.

“A lot of people in the plant are mad, but they don't know where to turn. They feel they have to play by the rules. The UAW doesn't play by the rules. They are criminals. All the executives got bonuses.

“In this system right now, the only way they make a profit is by screwing over the working class.”

A third-generation autoworker at Fiat Chrysler's Sterling Heights Assembly said, “In this coming contract struggle workers need to be in a position to call the shots.

We need to be telling the company how things are going to go. We need to be dictating the agenda to them, not the other way around.

“My personal opinions are in line with the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*. I studied labor economics in undergrad. And what I read in the *Newsletter* is much more consistent and true than what I was taught in school or what I’ve heard from labor leaders and organizations in the past. Things just don’t line up.

“The way that temporary workers are treated is a serious problem. To allow the company to put language in the contract that divides workers into tiers—why would we agree to that? Was the bribe money *that* generous that these UAW officials would be willing to introduce this cancer of division into the contract?

“The tenets that labor unions were supposedly built off of being united. I’m not seeing that from the UAW. I mean, look at what happened yesterday, with the UAW officials ordering workers to cross the picket lines of the janitors. They are dividing us.

“Workers need to be directly involved in the bargaining meetings. They should be live streamed. The power lies with us, the workers, not the leadership.”

A worker at Fiat-Chrysler’s Warren Truck plant said: “I will tell you this, and this has been my sentiment since I joined the union in 1995. I never understood why [only] one company would go on strike. I believe if the UAW really wanted to send a message, all three auto companies would strike together. That would have more of an impact than just one company going on strike.”

A second tier worker at nearby Warren Stamping said she had not even heard about the strike announcement until she heard about it from the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

“It’s crazy. A lot of us, unless we watch the news, we are under the bus about what is going on with the contract.” She hears nothing from the union, she said. “The most information I have been getting is through your newsletter or the news.”

Her first reaction upon hearing about the strike was, “Hey, go for it if they are not getting what they deserve. They extended our contract. I thought it should be everyone.”

She said she was “scared” about the strike being left in the hands of the UAW. “If there’s been that much going on [with the corruption scandal]... there’s no telling what else could happen. I don’t think they were trying to do it [the strike] in the first place, but they feared that people would walk off themselves.

“I know our reps are saying we are just going to

prepare. But I mean, even if we went on strike, that would affect a lot of people. The [temporary part-time workers] don’t get unemployment. That would affect their income. And if they cut off the strike before eight days, nobody gets anything.

“At our plant we have a lot of temps. This contract affects them in ways they don’t understand yet because they are new.” Even though they are working alongside the full-time employees, she said, “Sometimes they work the TPTs even harder than the full-timers.”

The worker said she started at the plant as a TPT before being hired in last year. “But I still work a second job. It’s still not enough pay. It’s enough to be comfortable for a moment but not a lot of security.

“I got three weeks of no pay because I was laid off [as a TPT]. You don’t get a lot of the benefits the full-timers get. I didn’t get any holiday pay. I wasn’t eligible for unemployment. I didn’t get the full health benefits.”

“If there is no extension and no contract, why did they have to wait for the meeting on Sunday?” another worker said on Sunday afternoon. “Then you have UAW Aramark employees at the plants that went on strike, and the UAW told production workers to report to work and cross the picket line. Union workers aren’t supposed to cross picket lines, and now they were told by the leadership to cross their own picket line!

“The UAW vice president [Terry Dittes] is now saying they will strike tonight, but they have not got an extension. The strike should be now! This sounds like a deal for GM already.”



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