

“All the union officials should be put back on the line and work ten years as TPTs”

GM workers determined to fight as Ford and Chrysler workers press to join strike

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On September 19 at 7:00 pm Eastern Time, the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online meeting to discuss the strategy and perspective needed to organize autoworkers against the conspiracy of the corporations and the United Auto Workers. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

On their first day on the picket lines, General Motors workers are expressing their determination to fight the auto giant. Workers are winning broad popular support for their stand in defense of health care and an end to the abuse of younger second-tier and temporary part-time (TPT) workers.

Early Monday morning, 46,000 GM workers at 35 manufacturing plants and dozens of parts distribution centers walked out on strike across 10 states. The strike is showing the enormous power of the working class. The company is set to lose \$100 million a day if the strike continues, according to the Wall Street bank Citigroup. GM's shares closed down more than 4 percent on Monday.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) was forced to call the strike because union executives concluded that trying to push through GM's concessionary demands would provoke a rebellion from workers already disgusted with the UAW for taking bribes to sign pro-company contracts in 2015 and before.

GM, which made \$27.5 billion in profits over the last four years, is demanding deep increases in workers' out-of-pocket expenses for health care, from the current three percent to 15 percent. It also wants an expansion of low-paid temporary and contract workers.

A skilled worker at the Flint Engine plant said, “The deal the UAW got from GM, there is no way they could have got that passed. We're not stupid. They offered an \$8,000 signing bonus, which works out to about an extra dollar over four years. Then we'll lose 15 percent of our pay to increased health care costs. That means we would take a pay

cut. No way from a company making billions.”

Temporary workers make up seven percent of GM's workforce. However, a top executive recently said the company wants half of its factory workers to be temps who are paid substandard wages and benefits and can be quickly dismissed in the event of a downturn in sales.

“We're trying to fight for job security, good benefits and pay,” said Roy, a young TPT worker with six months at the GM engine plant. “Trying to find a job around here with the living wage to support your family and take your kids to the doctor without paying \$1,000 a month is very hard.

“My dad was a GM worker for 30 years, but I have it worse than him. For every three workers who retire, they are only hiring one full-time worker. Some TPTs have been working eight years and have still not been rolled over to full time. We're striking so you can get hired in after 90 days and become permanent.”

Everything autoworkers are fighting against the UAW has imposed. Autoworkers have no trust in the UAW “negotiators” because they have been proven to be corrupt tools of corporate management.

As if to underscore this point, reports emerged on Monday that Vance Pearson, who is facing criminal charges that he conspired to steal workers dues money, is participating in the “negotiations” with GM. Pearson is a close associate of UAW President Gary Jones.

Jones could not even show his face at the press conference where the UAW announced the strike. He has been implicated in embezzling more than \$1 million in workers' money.

Pointing to the anger of workers, the *Wall Street Journal* complained, “Even if GM and the UAW can settle their differences and swiftly reach a tentative deal, winning ratification from members is likely to be more difficult than in past contracts, labor experts say. ‘It wouldn't surprise me

if the rank and file turn down the first contract they're offered just on general principle,' said Art Schwartz, a consultant and former GM labor-relations executive."

Striking GM workers in Flint, Michigan, expressed their determination to fight in comments to reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. Flint is the birthplace of the UAW and the heroic 1936–37 sit-down strike. It is also one of the centers of the UAW corruption scandal, with local leaders Norwood Jewell and Michael Grimes already going to jail or indicted.

"They should make the UAW officials go back on the line and work as TPTs for ten years," said Laura, a veteran GM worker with 20 years at the Flint Assembly Plant. "We've given up so much over the last 20 years, and it's time to stand up for what we want. All the corruption that's going on through GM and the UAW, that's really adding a lot to this situation we are going through. People are ready to fight for benefits and wage increases."

The outbreak of the strike—the first major national auto strike since 1976—also provoked comments from President Trump and the Democratic presidential candidates.

"Here we go again with General Motors and the United Auto Workers. Get together and make a deal!" the president tweeted. The rapid-fire succession of FBI raids, arrests and indictments by Trump's Justice Department has been used to tighten the screws on the UAW, which could face government receivership and long prison sentences for its top executives if they fail to impose management's dictates.

Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted a message to GM, calling for the company to "end the greed, sit down with the UAW and work out an agreement that treats your workers with the respect and the dignity they deserve." Former Vice President Joseph Biden tweeted, "Proud to stand with @UAW to demand fair wages and benefits for their members. America's workers deserve better."

The Democrats are rallying to the UAW bureaucracy, not rank-and-file workers. During the 2009 bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler, Biden and the Obama administration relied on the UAW to impose sweeping concessions on autoworkers, including halving the wages of all new hires and eliminating the eight-hour day.

The Democrats fear that the UAW will not be able to contain the struggle and that it will inspire broader sections of the working class to launch a counter-offensive against the decades of wage-cutting and austerity enforced by both corporate-controlled parties.

GM and the UAW resumed "negotiations" Monday. In reality, GM and UAW are conspiring to figure out a way to wear down the resistance of workers through a combination of starvation-level strike benefits and threats that a strike will provoke a recession.

It is "ridiculous" that workers are only getting \$250 a week in strike benefits when the UAW controls a strike fund worth three-quarters of a billion dollars, a Flint Engine worker said. "They changed the name of the strike fund to the 'Strike and Defense Fund,'" he said, "because they want to pay the legal fees to defend corrupt union officials, like Jewell and Grimes."

The UAW has extended the contracts for another 110,000 workers at Ford and Fiat Chrysler, but workers at both automakers have visited the picket lines of GM workers and are pressing to join the strike. "What we really want to do is shut down everything," a worker at the Fiat Chrysler's North Jefferson Assembly Plant in Detroit said. "Everyone should be out." The UAW "should have buses lined up to take people from the plant to the picket lines at GM, but they won't do that," she said, noting that workers would discuss joint strike action across all three automakers.

While autoworkers face powerful enemies, the automakers can be defeated if the full strength of workers is mobilized, including all Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers and broader sections of the working class.

This means taking the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the corrupt UAW by forming rank-and-file strike committees. These committees must be on guard against any attempt by the UAW to suddenly announce a deal and try to ram it through.

Workers must demand the tripling of strike pay to \$750 a week and the immediate reduction of all UAW officials' salaries to strike pay levels. The joint training centers must be liquidated and their assets used to sustain the type of protracted struggle against this corporate giant that is needed.

At the same time, US workers must establish direct links of communication with autoworkers throughout the world, including the courageous GM workers in Silao, Mexico, who have defied threats and victimization from management and have refused to accede to GM's demands to increase production while their brothers and sisters are on strike.

Responding to the solidarity of the Mexican workers, a veteran Flint Engine worker said, "I believe it's the workers of the world that will have to unite against the corporations and protect ourselves. It's not just the US and the Canadian workers anymore, I believe all of us are in the same fight."



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