

German workers support GM strikers in US

Our reporters
17 September 2019

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.

News of the strike by almost 50,000 GM workers in the US spread like wildfire through German factories yesterday. Here, too, the signs point to a storm.

Working conditions have changed dramatically in recent years. In the car factories and suppliers, one rationalization program follows the next. Standard jobs are replaced by temporary work, work contracts and other low-wage positions. Many thousands of jobs are at stake.

In early summer, Ford announced 12,000 job cuts and BASF 6,000 in Europe. Since the beginning of the year, General Motors has announced 14,000 redundancies, Volkswagen 7,000, Jaguar 4,500 and Tesla 3,000. Almost every day brings more bad news.

An Opel worker, who preferred not to give his name because he fears victimization, said the strike in the US was a very important development. He was not surprised that the workers had walked out.

“Exploitation has spread all over the world,” he said. “This is a general development that can be seen everywhere. We have the same experience ourselves.

“Opel-Werke long belonged to GM, but two years ago it was sold to the French PSA group. More and more people are being turned into temporary workers. They’re easy to throw out when you don’t need them anymore.

“The same system is to be implemented with us. Then the workers you can’t just lay off are transferred to outside firms like Segula.”

Murat Yilmaz, works council member at BMW in Munich, told the WSWs that from his own experience he had to tell the striking GM workers one thing above all: “In Germany and all over the world, the official trade unions are on the employers’ side. Every worker must understand that.

“Unions like IG Metall (IGM) and the UAW are not

reformable. Workers have to reassemble. They need to build new, clean organizations where only workers are represented.”

Yilmaz himself has been in opposition to IG Metall for years and has even set up his own trade union, which is why he has been targeted by the IGM and the BMW group. When he announced in March that he had secured the votes in a works council to elect him to the Supervisory Board as an “employee representative,” he was dismissed without notice by BMW.

The IGM-led works council agreed to the termination. Murat has been out of work since the beginning of April and is taking legal action against his dismissal. He himself feels that “times are changing.” Now is the time to make international contacts.

“Workers must stand together internationally,” he said.

Jochen Kuhlmann, a construction worker from Berlin, wrote to the WSWs:

“I hope that auto workers in the US will now be able to free themselves from the clutches of the trade unions, especially the UAW. The UAW’s monstrous corruption scandal may provide an opportunity to organize the strike and form action committees to maintain control from the outset.

“We already have connections to our Mexican and Canadian colleagues in the automotive industry. It would be a great encouragement to all car workers in the world, especially for the European and German ones, who have to deal with the ‘smarter’ corruption of their trade unions through the so-called ‘social partnership’ system.

“I wish the car workers in the US much strength and perseverance in their labor struggle to finally free themselves from increasing hustle and bustle and poor and unequal pay, and to fight for every job and for decent social benefits.”

Michael Krannich is 52 years old and a carpenter by trade. He wrote to the WSWs: “I live and work in Stuttgart, the city that can also be described as a car city. There are several car factories and important suppliers here.

“They include the Porsche plant in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Mercedes-Benz plants in Sindelfingen and Stuttgart-Untertürkheim, as well as suppliers such as the Bosch plants in Stuttgart-Feuerbach and the Mahle piston plants in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt.

“The fact that GM workers have been on strike since midnight has made many residents of the city sit up and take notice. I hope that the industrial action at the GM plants in Detroit will send an international signal to all car workers. The working class is an international class exploited worldwide by the same corporations and financial institutions.

“Workers must seize the opportunity here and now to enter the labor struggle and fight for better wages and fair social benefits.”

Sandra is a young mother from Stuttgart, whose husband works for the American government in Germany. She told the WSWS: “My German uncle has worked for Daimler for 40 years. I also wanted to take a job at Daimler as a temporary worker, but decided to take a different path after hearing so many negative things.

“And yes, I heard about the strikes at GM. My father-in-law retired a few years ago after working there, and we still have family at GM in Michigan.”

Asked about the corruption scandal at GM, Sandra said, “I have heard about the corruption scandal and I believe that not only GM workers should go on strike. It’s time for the people who built these companies to stand up and face these huge companies. They should realize that they are nothing without the workers who do the dirty work for them just to make them richer.”

When asked whether she would advise Daimler employees in Germany to follow the example of their colleagues in the US and go on strike, Sandra replied, “Yes, I would advise Daimler workers to do the same. Especially Daimler workers in Germany.

“Because once you get up you’re a thorn in the side of the company and they might try to get rid of you afterwards. But workers in Germany have been better protected thanks to the social system and therefore have more freedom. In the US a job loss would be a real struggle.

“Sometimes you just have to do what has to be done. It is unacceptable for large companies to earn billions of dollars and neither pay their workers properly nor provide them with health insurance.

“It’s the same at Daimler. They now hire workers from temporary employment agencies who do exactly the same work as permanent employees but work under terrible

conditions for the minimum wage. The government should put an end to this.

“Nobody should be employed by a large company that treats him so badly and then pays him only the minimum wage, so that he remains dependent on state support. It makes me upset!”

Sven Ehm is a 35-year-old forklift driver in Berlin. He wrote to the WSWS: “I wholeheartedly support the strike of the car workers of General Motors! What the car companies do is an impertinence!

“My late father, who was only 55 years old, had worked for Daimler Benz in Berlin-Marienfelde for 38 years. Even then, he could see that large companies like Daimler Benz were hiring more and more temporary workers in order to make even more profit.

“Although the temporary workers do the same work as the permanent employees, they did not receive even half of the salary the permanent employees earned! Even I was in a temporary employment agency a few years ago and could see with my own eyes what was going on there. I was not even allowed to take part in a registered IG Metall strike!

“I was told I had the right to participate, but would not be paid for the time I did not work in the company! So much for the beautiful democracy in Germany!!!

“The permanent employees as well had only frustration. The only ones who were doing well were the suit-wearing gentlemen from the executive floor!

“I have also read about the conditions under which a worker has to work at Ford, Chrysler or General Motors, and I definitely cannot endorse that! I very much welcome the fact that the workers of General Motors in the US are organizing a strike and, in the end, are carrying it out!

“I hope that action committees will be created to give workers a platform! In the US and also in Germany!”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact