

GM shuts off healthcare for striking autoworkers, begins to use scabs in attempt to break strike

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Auto giant General Motors is moving aggressively to break the strike by nearly 50,000 autoworkers in the US.

The company has already cut off healthcare for striking workers, forcing them onto substandard insurance provided by the UAW strike fund. The move was seen by commentators as a major and deliberate provocation, with the Detroit *Free Press* describing it as “pouring gas on the fire.”

The company is already hiring scabs to reopen key facilities, including plants in Arlington, Wentzville and Flint.

The giant auto company is losing up to \$100 million a day due to the strike, which has already led to a shortage of parts and production slowdowns in Canada and Mexico. GM has announced 1,200 temporary layoffs at its assembly plant in Oshawa due to a shortage of parts. Parts supplier Lear has laid off an entire department at its facility in Ramos Arizpe, Mexico.

The global impact of the strike demonstrates the unity of interests between American workers and their brothers and sisters around the world, who are integrated in a global process of production and who face the same transnational corporations. Moreover, GM workers have overwhelming support from workers in other countries, as demonstrated by the meetings held by autoworkers in Silao, Mexico in support of the US strike.

Autoworkers are not only fighting CEO Mary Barra and other corporate executives in Detroit. Behind them stand Wall Street and powerful global investors who want an intensification of the assault on the working class to fuel the endless rise on the stock markets.

Just a few weeks after Wall Street threatened to reduce Ford’s credit rating to “junk status” for not implementing a savage cost-cutting drive fast enough, the Moody’s credit rating agency issued the same threat to GM if it does not quickly defeat the strike and impose its dictates on workers.

In a *New York Times* column Tuesday, Steven Greenhouse warned that the “Autoworkers strike is bigger than GM.” It is part of a wave of strikes over the last two years by teachers, supermarket, hotel and other workers, which has been fueled by “Americans’ widespread dismay with wage stagnation and income inequality, even as corporate profits are flying high.” Greenhouse writes that “successful strikes beget successful strikes.”

The seriousness with which the ruling class takes this struggle is shown by the rapid intervention of the Trump administration, which wants an end to the strike and to push through a deal in which the UAW accepts management’s terms in exchange for keeping one or two plants open and supposedly “saving American jobs.”

As for the Democrats, they are the false friends of autoworkers. While claiming they support the strike, their main concern is to maintain the organizational domination of the UAW and force through further concessions. It was the Obama administration, working with the UAW, that led the assault on autoworkers during the 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler, which included expanding the two-tier wage system and eliminating overtime after eight hours.

As for the UAW, it does not have a strategy for victory, it has a strategy for defeat. The UAW, whose top leadership faces indictment for embezzlement and

bribery charges, has forced 110,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers to stay on the job even though both automakers are demanding similar, if not worse, concessions from workers.

At the same time, the UAW is not paying any strike benefits for the first week, and after that a pitiful \$250 a week, guaranteeing that workers will face financial pressures to end the strike.

The UAW has also not called for mass picketing and mass demonstrations to stop strikebreaking. In at least some locations, it is explicitly ordering workers to allow scabs through unhindered, cynically using the threat of arrest to intimidate workers. Moreover, the strike was only called after the union ordered production workers on Sunday to cross the picket lines of maintenance workers, who are also in the UAW.

The UAW fears that even a perceived victory would encourage other workers to rebel against decades of union-backed concessions, disrupting its decades-long relations with the corporations. Its “negotiations” with the company are little more than a grand plea bargain, whereby figures such as Gary Jones hope to avoid lengthy jail terms by demonstrating their value in shutting down the strike as soon as possible.

To carry out a serious fight, workers must break the UAW-imposed isolation of the strike and mobilize the full weight of the working class in defense of the autoworkers.

This requires the formation of a network of rank-and-file factory committees operating in every plant, democratically controlled by the workers.

GM workers organized in factory committees should make an urgent appeal to their brothers and sisters at Ford and Fiat Chrysler, who are no less determined to fight, to join them in their struggle.

They must turn out into the neighborhoods, to student youth, teachers, warehouse workers, and other sections of the working class in order to make their struggle the focal point of a broader movement of the entire working class.

Above all, autoworkers must link up their struggle with workers internationally, who confront essentially the same conditions and the same globally organized capitalist system. In particular, this means linking up with the tens of millions of autoworkers and auto parts workers throughout the world.

Without such an international strategy, based on an

understanding of the international scope and character of the class struggle, it is impossible even to organize a unified movement in the American auto industry, which is composed not only of the Detroit automakers but the dozens of foreign-based transnational auto companies that operate in the United States.



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