

“The union is a company now”

Striking GM autoworkers call for expansion of strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler, denounce UAW sabotage

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On September 19 at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online meeting to discuss the strategy and perspective needed to win the strike. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

Autoworkers from throughout the United States spoke to the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter Tuesday and Wednesday on the strike at General Motors, the ongoing UAW corruption scandal and the need for a broad struggle of the working class.

Arlington Assembly Plant

Several GM workers at Arlington Assembly spoke to the Newsletter before going to the picket line Tuesday. News had broken earlier in the day that the company is hiring scab labor to reopen the plant, which produces highly profitable SUVs.

“They’re still taking trucks out from the yard, and I’m wondering why somebody isn’t stopping them,” said one worker. “If I was the president of the union, we’d have everyone out there.” She added, “Really, Chrysler and Ford should be on strike right now. They’re talking about unity, but where’s our unity? We need to stand together in solidarity.”

Another said: “The UAW corruption is what’s blowing my mind. They’re stealing hundreds of thousands, and it’s like pulling teeth to get any money for us. They’re not for us. I’m up in arms with all this. I’ve been there seven years, and I’ve been hearing what the older cats were up against. They gave up a lot to get the company in good standing, and the company promised they’d make it right later, and now it’s later.”

A third-generation autoworker told the fact that they sold us out, breaks my heart and challenges my belief in the union. It’s heartbreaking. The union is a business now. They sit on the GM board themselves—on the other side of the street.”

A TPT worker from Arlington described the brutal conditions facing temps at the plant. “Just being a temp for years is discouraging. They said GM was saving money keeping us temp workers. There are people who have been temps for five years... We don’t get any bonuses, no vacation, just three unpaid days a year. I go to work every day, I’m never late, I work any overtime I can, and I try to do every job they train me on as quick as I can.

“It’s appalling to me. I’m trying to be a dedicated worker and I pay my dues, only to have them [the UAW] take it for themselves. They don’t fight for us here. When I have a problem, nothing is ever done about it. I had an incident last year where I got sick at work and started feeling bad to the point where I thought I would pass out.”

When she tried to get permission to leave the line to seek medical attention, she says, “the superintendent comes to me and says, ‘Do you know who I am, young lady?’ And he accused me of abandoning my job, saying he’s here to make sure the line keeps running.

“By the time I got to medical, my blood pressure was so high the nurse said I could’ve had a heart attack or a stroke. I had worked too much, and when I saw my doctor later, he said my body was just exhausted. We can’t do sick leave, so they just laid me off for two weeks until I could work again.

“My point is, I went to file a grievance for treating me the way they did to just go to medical, and nothing was ever done [by the union].

“We had a man die on the line last year. This man had worked for General Motors for 30 years, and he was dead by the time he hit the floor. When they saw him fall over,

everyone ran to see what happened, and the line stopped for a second, and they made us get right back to work and just pushed him right out of the way. The management said get somebody back on the line, and it started back up.”

Warren Technical Center

A team from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* interviewed workers on the picket lines at the sprawling GM Tech Center in Warren, Michigan. There are approximately 2,000 members of UAW Local 160 who work at the Tech Center, including workers from Aramark, who were also picketing Tuesday afternoon. The Aramark workers have been without a contract for over a year.

Pickets were joined by a number of workers from Fiat Chrysler, who came on their own initiative from the Jefferson North Assembly Plant and the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant.

A mechanic, who wished not to be identified, said: “The world is changing. The most important thing we gave up over the last 40 years was the cost of living adjustments. ... So, we don’t cost them (GM) anything anymore.

“There’s only 50,000 of us. Not even 50, that’s nobody. The second-tier wage was never supposed to happen. But they [the union] let it happen. Good luck trying to get it back. They gave it up! It was the stupidest thing! I don’t doubt that it was because they were on the payroll of the companies. I don’t doubt anything.

“I thought strategy-wise, that they should have done [struck] all three companies,” he concluded.

“I wish we could all strike at the same time, and I feel it’s important for all of us to be out here—for our voices to be heard,” Stefani, a young TPT from Sterling Heights Assembly Plant said. “So that’s why I’m out here. I think if we all went out it would be too much for the companies. I’m not sure why the UAW doesn’t call us all out; they should. Larger groups—it says more.”

Two young Aramark workers said they were hired in at \$11.25 per hour and have not yet been given the expected \$16 an hour, which they are entitled to after a year. They explained that after two years on the job a worker can expect to become full-time, but the hourly rate is decreased to \$13 an hour in exchange for receiving company health care.

An older woman worker from Aramark said, “We pay for our own health care! And I have no idea what is being negotiated for our contract, but I heard the company wants to give us a \$1-an-hour raise but make us pay for hospitalization. That is going backwards!”

Flint Truck Assembly

“This is my first strike ever,” Ned, a GM worker from Flint said. “And when I walked out [to the picket lines the other day] I felt like I was walking out of an old era of history. In our world, this [strike] is most definitely history. I want to fight for what I know that I deserve.”

“I worked two years as a temp at \$22 per hour,” he said. “Then they did away with the Cost of Living Adjustment. The union told me that they had fought for me, and that I was lucky to have a job, but that now I was only going to make \$14 per hour. And then my two ‘raises’ brought me up to \$16 per hour. I was better off as a temp! I took an \$8 pay cut when I was making peanuts anyways.”

“When the UAW told us to cross the picket line of the striking Aramark workers on Sunday, it broke my heart. It didn’t really affect me until I was pulling past them, honking my horn in support, while at the same time crossing their picket line. I went in at 10pm, crossed their picket line, and then at midnight that night I walked out.”

“The union is a good thing,” he said, “but the UAW is broken. Even in the locals, if you’re not part of the clique, you’re not included—it’s a form of favoritism. We have a corporation that’s greedy and doesn’t want to give us what we deserve, and then we have a union that is working for the corporations. Because of that, a lot of employees don’t even want to be part of the union. Caught between the company and the union, we feel like we are losing either way.”

He added, “I’ve been reading and following the *Autoworker Newsletter*. I know what goes on in my local, but it’s really nice to know what is going on globally as well as nationally. I read it because it affects me and my family. Having the knowledge is key.”



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