

“We should all be on strike”

Autoworkers call for industrywide action to back strike by GM workers

Jerry White
20 September 2019

The strike by 47,000 General Motors workers in the US, which entered its fifth day today, is the longest walkout at the company since the 67-day strike by 460,000 GM workers in 1970. It is also the largest industrial strike in the US in years and follows a wave of walkouts by teachers, supermarket, hotel and healthcare workers.

On the picket lines, autoworkers remain defiant despite the company’s decision to cut off medical benefits. Local media reports say workers and family members picking up medicines, visiting doctors or even recovering from surgeries found out all of sudden that they were uninsured.

General Motors is digging in for a long fight. It has begun hiring strikebreakers in Missouri, Texas and the suburbs of Flint, Michigan, the historic birthplace of the UAW and site of the 1936-37 sit-down strike. The company’s last offer was for a below inflation raise or bonus of 2 percent each year, which would be more than eaten up by a rise in out-of-pocket healthcare expenses of around 3 to 15 percent.

As the *Wall Street Journal* wrote Thursday, GM’s Chief Executive Mary Barra “is trying to shed the automaker’s long-held reputation for ignoring problems” and “show Wall Street that today’s GM is leaner and more assertive than the one that collapsed into bankruptcy a decade ago.”

After an initial fall in share values after the strike began Monday, GM stocks have risen, although there was a slight fall at the end of the day Thursday. Wall Street investors are willing to bankroll the fight against workers, but the credit rating agency Moody’s threatened to downgrade GM to junk bond status if it does not quickly defeat the strike and impose its

demands.

Workers are determined to claw back concessions handed over by the United Auto Workers, including during the 2009 restructuring of GM by the Obama administration. Over the last 10 years workers have suffered a 16 percent fall in real wages. Over the course of the last four-year UAW agreement alone, GM has made \$35 billion in profits.

The UAW, however, is deliberately isolating the striking GM workers by ordering 110,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers to remain on the job. Inside the factories there is widespread support for an industrywide walkout.

“We all want to go on strike,” a Ford worker in Michigan told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “We are watching what’s going on with this strike every day, very carefully. Every worker is on the edge of their seat. I feel that something really big is going to need to happen. What should happen is that all the workers from Ford, Fiat Chrysler and General Motors should be called out on strike.

“We have been ready to strike, but the UAW doesn’t listen to the membership. The union is corrupt. All of them, from International President Gary Jones whose house was just raided by the FBI all the way down to the locals, are making deals with the company.”

“We should have shut it all down,” said a worker at Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit. “Then the companies would have known this is real. The parts plants should definitely be part of this too. It should be spread everywhere.”

Referring to gross levels of inequality in America, she added, “I just saw that Bill Gates just made another \$16 billion. This money came from the sweat off

somebody's back.”

In an effort to starve workers into submission, the UAW is giving strikers \$250 in strike pay, and they will not see the first check until the end of the second week of picketing. The UAW has also organized no mass picketing or demonstrations against GM's strikebreaking operations. On the contrary, it has welcomed the strikebreaking as a means of intimidating workers.

On Wednesday, workers reacted with disgust and anger when a UAW official who they identified as Local 651 President Brett Baker ordered them to break their picket lines and allow a line of cars filled with strikebreakers to enter the GM Davidson Road Processing Center in Burton, a suburb of Flint.

In a letter released Thursday, UAW Vice President Terry Dittes told striking GM workers that “negotiating” teams had been meeting into the evening each day since the strike began. Dittes claimed that “some progress has been made” and that talks were underway “in subcommittees and main tables.”

Dittes gave workers absolutely no details of what the company was demanding or what if any counterproposals the UAW had made. In fact, the behind-the-scenes talks with GM are aimed at one thing: seeking to find the best way to impose a deal worked out long ago on a resistant workforce, which correctly sees the UAW as little more than a bribed tool of management.

If workers do not take the conduct of this struggle into their own hands, the UAW will isolate the strike and shut it down on management's terms. This is why autoworkers must form rank-and-file strike and factory committees to bring out all workers throughout the auto and auto parts industry and fight to transform this industrial action into a powerful social movement of the working class against the decades-long war by the corporate and financial elite.

A network of rank-and-file committees must also reach out to workers internationally. It is not possible to even conduct an effective strike, let alone a broader fight against plant closings, layoffs and wage-cutting, without uniting workers across borders. This means rejecting the filthy nationalism and anti-Mexican chauvinism promoted by the UAW, the Unifor union in Canada, the Trump administration and the Democrats.

The international dimensions of the struggle are

quickly emerging. After a three-day strike last week, thousands of GM workers in South Korea are resuming job actions today to oppose company demands for an extension of a pay freeze. GM shut a plant in Gunsan last year as part of its global restructuring, which also involves the shutdown of five North American plants, including assembly plants in Detroit, Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario.

The 47,000 striking GM workers in the US are part of much larger global workforce, including 58,000 production workers in China, 16,000 in Mexico and 10,000 in Canada. Workers at GM's factory in Silao, Mexico have stood up to vindictive firings and disciplinary action and refused to accept GM's demand for additional production to make up for the loss of pickup trucks due to the US strike.

The walkout in the US has already hit GM's Canadian operations, leading to layoffs in Oshawa and St. Catherine's as well as suppliers in Windsor such as Martin Transportation Systems (MTS), which laid off 80 workers.

Layoffs have also hit suppliers in Mexico, including the Lear auto parts plant at Ramos Arizpe, which told 150 of its 700 workers who produce seats and armrests to go home.

“Wow, an international solidarity is a must,” said a Fiat Chrysler worker at the Sterling Heights plant. “Workers globally should become allies. We cannot allow corporations to continue to pit us against each other.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact