Elizabeth Warren promotes economic nationalism at Detroit GM workers' picket line

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Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren staged a press event Sunday at the picket line outside the General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck plant. She stressed the theme of economic nationalism that she has made one of the centerpieces of her campaign.

The visit by the Massachusetts Senator to Detroit was part of a series of campaign events staged by leading Democratic presidential hopefuls aimed at bolstering the United Auto Workers. This includes former vice president Joe Biden, who visited a picket line in Kansas City, Kansas yesterday, and Senator Bernie Sanders, who is scheduled to visit Detroit Wednesday.

The intervention of the Democratic candidates is not aimed at advancing the struggle of workers but to bolster the embattled UAW. The UAW is desperately seeking to contain and shut down the strike, which cuts across their corporatist relations with management and threatens to spark a wider movement in the working class.

The UAW, which over the past 40 years has collaborated with the auto companies in imposing concessions contacts, is massively discredited. It has been exposed as a corrupt tool of management as a result of an ongoing federal investigation that has seen the indictment of top level officials.

General Motors is under pressure from Wall Street to impose further significant cuts on autoworkers, including the expanded use of contract and temporary workers and sharp cuts to healthcare. GM workers, on the other hand, are determined to reverse decades of concessions imposed by the auto companies.

The key to GM's strategy is to rely on the UAW to sabotage the strike. The union is forcing strikers to subsist on meager $250 strike checks while sitting on a $760 million strike fund. At the same time, it has kept workers at Ford and Fiat Chrysler on the job in a move to keep GM workers isolated.

The Warren event attracted several hundred local supporters of the Senator as well as lower-level union officials, but very few striking workers. While the Democratic Socialists of America has officially endorsed Bernie Sanders, a number of DSA members were present at the event, as were members of Autoworkers Caravan, which has served as an enthusiastic cheerleader for the UAW.

After briefly joining the picket line of GM workers in Detroit, Warren stopped to make a statement to the press. Flanked by UAW officials, Warren launched into an economic nationalist tirade that has been the centerpiece of her campaign.

"GM is demonstrating that it has no loyalty to the workers of America or the people of America," she said. "Their only loyalty is to their own bottom line. And if they can save a nickel by moving a job to Mexico or to Asia or to anywhere else on this planet, they will do it," she continued, adding, "Workers of the UAW are here to say, 'No more.' They want a contract that keeps jobs in America."

This is in line with Warren's "Plan for Economic Patriotism," a document that she issued last June that reprises the "America First" nationalism of Donald Trump. It is also the stock-in-trade of the American trade union bureaucracy, which blames "unfair trade" and foreign workers for the devastation of working-class communities such as Detroit and Flint, Michigan that have suffered the wholesale loss of jobs.

The aim of such demagogy is to divert workers' anger away from the capitalist system and Wall Street

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and redirect it against their working-class brothers and sisters in Latin America, Asia and Europe. This is doubly reactionary under conditions in which the strike by US GM workers is winning wide support internationally, including from workers in Mexico, Brazil and Canada.

In tandem with her extreme economic nationalism, Warren has embraced the national security doctrine of the Trump administration in which great power conflict has replaced the "war on terror" as the axis of US military policy. This orientation is directed at war preparations against Russia and China.

Significantly, Warren said nothing beyond vague generalities about the specific issues that sparked the strike, including workers' demands to end the abuse of temporary part-time workers, eliminate tiers, win substantial pay increases and defend health care benefits.

UAW officials intervened several times to cut off questions from this reporter to Warren about the imposition of the two-tier wage system by the Obama administration.

Warren's profession of "support" for autoworkers battling concessions is the height of duplicity given the central role that successive Democratic Party administrations have played in driving down wages and destroying jobs in the auto industry. The Democratic Carter administration insisted on steep wage cuts as a condition for the 1979 bailout of Chrysler. The concessions agreed to by the UAW set the stage for a wave of wage cuts and unionbusting throughout basic industry.

Similarly, the 2009 forced bankruptcy and reorganization of GM and Chrysler overseen by the Obama administration imposed a 50 percent wage cut on all newly hired autoworkers. This two-tier system has metastasized into a multi-tier system, with the expanded use of contract and temporary part-time workers who are super-exploited, but still must pay dues to the UAW.

For her part, Warren, who has described herself as "capitalist to the bone," participated in a panel overseeing the 2008-2009 federal bailout of Wall Street banks. While the Democrats insisted on massive cuts for workers, the wealthy criminals responsible for the financial crash faced no sanctions and in fact were rewarded.

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