

Autoworkers need a socialist and internationalist strategy to fight GM and the auto companies

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The strike by 48,000 General Motors workers, now in its second week, has revealed the real class relations in America and throughout the world. After a decade of soaring profits, GM executives are determined to impose new and deeper concessions on workers to feed the demands of Wall Street for ever higher returns on investments.

The consensus in the corporate media and political establishment was expressed Tuesday by President Obama's former "Car Czar" Steven Rattner in a *New York Times* column titled, "Autoworkers face a tough road ahead."

Rattner starts by acknowledging that the decade-long "labor peace" in the industry had been broken by workers "seeking to redress years of pain, particularly during the 2008 recession and subsequent rescue by the Obama administration."

"Having headed President Barack Obama's auto task force," Rattner writes, "I'm deeply sympathetic to the plight of blue-collar workers in the automobile industry. But unfortunately, when it comes to the manufacturing sector, where the United States faces global competition, restoring the generous pay and benefits that used to accompany these jobs becomes impossible without jeopardizing the jobs themselves," Rattner writes.

One might be skeptical of Rattner's "deep sympathy" for autoworkers, given that it comes from an investment banker who oversaw Obama's restructuring of GM and Chrysler in 2009. With the collusion of the UAW, the White House task force wiped out at least 36,000 jobs, slashed the wages of new workers in half, abolished the eight-hour day and ended company-paid retiree health benefits.

Be that as it may, Rattner insists that autoworkers have no choice but to give up more. That is because the former Morgan Stanley and Lehman Brothers banker defends capitalist property relations and the logic of the market. If that is your starting point, then it is true: workers will have to compete against each other and work like dogs, or they won't have any jobs at all.

Capitalism is based on exploitation and the competition between the capitalist owners to lower their labor costs and maximize the amount of profit they pump out of the working class. Corporations that do not produce adequate returns for their shareholders are punished by investors driving down their value of their stocks.

In an attempt to cover up this reality, Rattner writes: "I'm all for workers earning more, but it's important to understand that, at least in the car industry, this is not a case of rapacious investors profiting at the expense of workers. Since its initial public offering in November 2010, GM stock has risen by only 13 percent, compared with 154 percent for the overall market."

In fact, under the whip of "activist investor" Harry Wilson, one of Rattner's fellow hedge fund investors on the Obama White House auto task force, GM's Board of Directors has authorized at least \$14 billion in stock buybacks since March 2015 aimed at driving up the company's stock values for its richest shareholders.

It is precisely to increase the returns to investors that GM announced the shutdown of five North American plants and the wiping out of 14,000 hourly and white-collar jobs last November. It is also why corporate management is refusing to budge on its demands to create a low-paid temporary workforce to shape the future of the global auto industry. GM also wants to

destroy health care coverage that autoworkers have won, which Forbes recently denounced as “the last vestige of quasi-socialism that dominated the US auto industry for 100 years.”

Wall Street has made clear its demands in relation to the strike. Credit rating agency Moody’s warned earlier this month that if GM fails to shut down the strike quickly and force through major concessions, it will downgrade the company’s credit rating.

The conclusion workers should reach is not that they should accept cuts, but that they should not accept capitalism. The logic of the class struggle, with workers in the US and around the world increasingly fighting against social inequality and a return to conditions of industrial slavery, is inexorably leading in the direction of a conscious fight for socialism.

That the growth of the class struggle internationally will take on a socialist political orientation is the greatest fear of the ruling class. This fear of socialism was expressed in Trump’s rants in front of the United Nations Tuesday. “One of the most serious challenges our country has faced is the specter of socialism,” Trump said. “Today, I repeat a message for the world that I have delivered at home: America will never be a socialist country.”

If the capitalist class insists that it cannot afford to guarantee the most basic social rights of workers—good paying and secure jobs, health care, pensions and decent working conditions—then the working class will have to take political power in its own hands and reorganize economic life based on the principle of equality, genuine democracy and the collective ownership of the wealth produced by the labor of billions of workers around the world.

The fight for socialism is inextricably linked to the fight to unify workers internationally on the basis of their common class interests.

GM, Ford and the other transnational corporations have a global strategy. Workers need a global strategy to fight back. Today, the organization of an effective strike, let alone the development of a powerful movement against world capitalism, is not possible without coordinating the struggles of the international working class.

The strivings of workers to organize internationally is expressed in the global support for the GM strike and the heroic actions of the GM workers in Silao, Mexico,

who have stood up to arbitrary firings and threats and defied management demands that they increase production during the strike in the US. The unification of autoworkers in a common struggle means rejecting the anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese chauvinism peddled by the UAW and the Democratic and Republican parties.

The organization of a counter-offensive by the working class requires the building of rank-and-file strike committees, independent of the nationalist and pro-capitalist UAW, to coordinate a common struggle of autoworkers around the world to secure their social rights.

This must be connected to a political movement of the entire working class in opposition to a global system of exploitation, capitalism, on the basis of the fight for a global system of rational planning based on social need, not private profit—socialism.



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