

“It would be wonderful if the strike expanded to the other auto plants”

Michigan auto parts worker speaks in support of GM strike

Our reporter
27 September 2019

The fight by General Motors workers is winning broad support in the working class across the US and internationally. The issues being raised by GM workers such as the abuse of temporary part-time and contract workers particularly resonates among workers in the auto parts industry, which is increasingly based on the super-exploitation of younger workers.

The World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter* recently spoke to Sharmaine, a young auto parts worker in Michigan about the issues raised in the strike of GM workers and the issues auto parts workers face.

Starting wages for auto parts workers can be as low as \$9 an hour while workers face long hours and abominable conditions. This situation is largely the outcome of the intervention of the United Auto Workers (UAW). Beginning in the 1980s the UAW sabotaged a series of strikes at auto parts plants, leading to a wave of wage cutting. Then, beginning in the 1990s the Detroit-based auto companies began spinning off their parts divisions, creating lower wage subsidiaries.

Facing near-poverty wages and unsafe conditions earlier this year, auto parts workers employed by French-based Faurecia struck in Saline, Michigan. However, the UAW ended the strike just as it began to have a broader impact. It then rammed through a sellout deal that failed to address abusive conditions at the factory.

Now GM and other automakers are demanding these same types of conditions be brought into auto assembly plants through the expanded use of temporary and

contract workers employed at vastly inferior pay and conditions.

At the same time the strike by GM workers illustrates workers enormous power, given the integrated character of the global auto industry. The walkout has led to the shutdown of plants and the disruption of operations in Mexico and Canada. US supplier plants have reportedly also been affected including Nexteer Automotive, American Axle, Magna, Lear and Aptiv.

“It would be wonderful if the GM strike expanded to the other auto plants and the plants where people like me work,” said Sharmaine. “There are a lot of people who are in the same situation that I am in and who are treated in the exact same way.

“Right now I am between jobs, and that really hurts. I did apply for the new jobs at Chrysler, that is, I qualified in the pre-approval process. With the strike and everything going on I wasn't really in the mindset to put the application in. I would have thought that it would have been on hold for now!

“Though I am 25 years old I have worked in four different plants already. Some made parts for auto, others did other things. One was a Chrysler supplier. I work extremely hard when I have a job and I am desperately looking for a new job when I don't.

“Everyone has the right to have a decent job at my age. Just because we're young does not mean we shouldn't be paid properly. I'm not the only one. There are a lot of people who work in these factories for 30, 60 or 90 days and then they fire us before we ever make it to regular pay. We even work harder, just because we want to get hired into that regular job.

“We work twelve-hour days at these places. We work these hours and go like this for four or five days a week. Sometimes we get overtime hours. We will go to a plant and sometimes there are people with six or seven years (seniority) doing exactly the same job that we are doing but they're getting a lot more money than the \$9.45 minimum wage we get. It's not fair for us to come in and work to make the company so profitable, to work as hard as we do, and we cannot make enough money to live.

“We work longer, harder, for less money. We make the company profitable, but they don't hire us in. When we are fired, they just say they don't need us anymore. Then they turn around and hire other people into those same minimum wage jobs, tell them to work hard and don't miss a day and don't be late. The people do that because they need a job and then they are fired anyway.

“Everything I am explaining is happening to other people and is also the exact story of my life. That is why I think it would be wonderful if we could expand the GM strike to the other auto plants and to the other suppliers and smaller plants like the ones where I have worked.

“I feel irritated and disappointed about how bad the situation is. Sometimes it makes me get to the point where I don't even want to work. It's difficult when you can't find a job that pays enough to live. We have kids, we have bills, we are no different than anybody else; so why are we treated this way?

“They are pushing us all the time so they can make the money. I ask myself all the time ‘What more do you have to do to get a hired in?’”

“I'm going to reach out to my family and friends with your articles,” she told the *Autoworker Newsletter*. “I know a lot of them work in the auto industry. I know a lot of young people that are going through what I am going through. I want to see this changed.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact