

A call to action:

Why students and youth should support striking GM workers

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)—US
1 October 2019

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student movement of the Socialist Equality Party, stands in solidarity with the 48,000 General Motors workers who are entering their third week of strike action against the giant transnational corporation.

The workers are striking in opposition to the demands by GM for deep increases in workers' out-of-pocket expenses for health care, from the current three percent to 15 percent, and an expansion of low-paid temporary and contract workers.

Following the financial crash in 2008, GM was bailed out by the Obama administration, which imposed massive concessions on autoworkers, leading to record profits. For the wealthy Wall Street shareholders that is not enough. GM wants to destroy the right of workers—whose bodies are beaten up in the factories producing the company's profits—to have fully funded health care, which Forbes recently denounced as “quasi-socialism.”

The biggest issue in the strike, however, is the determination of older workers to guarantee that the next generation can have the right to a good-paying and secure job. Workers want to fight for the principle of “equal pay for equal work” and abolish the so-called two-tier system, which pays younger workers half the wages of older workers for doing the same work. They also want to convert all temporary part-time (TPT) workers into full-time workers, with regular pay and benefits.

The horrific conditions facing TPT workers was tragically expressed in the death of 21-year-old Jacoby Hennings in October 2017 who was forced to work two jobs to earn the same pay as his parents. This is

emblematic of the conditions confronting a whole generation of young workers, including millions of college students who will have to labor decades to pay off their student loans. Between 1978 and 2017, CEO compensation rose in the US by 1,070 percent, while the typical worker's compensation over these 39 years rose by a mere 11.2 percent.

The IYSSE extends its fullest support to GM and other autoworkers. But supporting these embattled workers does not mean simply cheering them on. The political issues involved in the autoworkers strike are immense and have ramifications for the entire working class. Supporting this strike means telling workers the truth about the enemies they face and the potential allies they need to rally in order to prevail.

GM workers are not just fighting GM, but the whole capitalist system and both big business parties—Trump and the Democrats and Republicans—who represent the super-rich and have waged a decades-long war against the working class.

While autoworkers are determined to fight, the great problem they face is that the organization that claims to “represent” and “bargain” for them—the United Auto Workers (UAW)—has been bribed by the very same corporations the workers are fighting. All the conditions workers are fighting—temporary labor, two-tier wages, cuts to health care—were all agreed to by the UAW.

The UAW officials did not want this strike, but they felt they could not push through another pro-company contract without a revolt. So now the UAW and GM are trying to wear down the strikers and use economic hardship to push through an unpopular contract.

Even though another 110,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler

workers want to join the strike, the UAW is forcing them to work. The UAW is also only paying workers \$250 a week in strike pay, even though it controls a strike fund worth \$800 million.

That is why the IYSSE supports the call for workers to take the conduct of the strike into their own hands through the election of rank-and-file strike and factory committees. These committees would spread the strike throughout the entire auto industry, unite autoworkers with other workers and young people who are fighting school cuts, high tuition and a future of poverty and war, and build a powerful social movement against capitalist exploitation and social inequality.

The global strategy of the corporations to slash jobs and pay the lowest wages must be countered with a global strategy to unite autoworkers across all boundaries. Ten thousand GM workers in Korea recently went on strike and GM workers in Mexico have refused to handle more work during the US strike, courageously defying management threats and the firing of militant workers. In France, Puerto Rico and Hong Kong, workers and youth have been involved in mass demonstrations in defense of their social and democratic rights.

This reemergence of the class struggle on an international scale is exploding the decades-long attempt, including by dominant sections of academia, to slander, diminish and deny the revolutionary potential of the working class. It shows that the major issue in America and around the world is not race and gender but class. On the GM picket lines are men and women, black, white and immigrant workers all engaged in a common struggle to defend their class interests.

The ramifications of the outcome of this struggle will affect layers of workers and youth far beyond GM. The framework set in the upcoming contract will serve as a new baseline for the exploitation of workers not just at Ford and Fiat Chrysler, but throughout auto and other manufacturing industries more broadly, with implications for the entire global capitalist economic system.

The IYSSE urges youth and students to draw the necessary conclusions—that what is required to secure a victory for striking GM workers is the same for all the struggles of the working class: a unified fight of the international working class for socialism and against all institutions and representatives of the capitalist state.

GM and other car companies have made trillions of dollars from exploitation of generations of workers. They have closed hundreds of factories in Detroit, Flint and other cities, leaving nothing behind but economic devastation, poverty and environmental disasters. The auto industry must be transformed into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by workers themselves. This must be part of a planned world socialist economy based on the principle of production for human need, not private profit. Only in this way can safe and affordable transportation be made available for all and the livelihoods of the current and future workers secured.

If you agree with the perspective of the IYSSE, we urge you to get involved: send in a statement of support for striking GM workers, share this statement on social media, and most importantly join the IYSSE and take up the fight for socialism today. There is no time to lose.



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