

“The CEOs and Wall Street are trying to take your wages and benefits... Don’t Give in. Stand your ground!”

Detroit college students support striking GM workers

Genevieve Leigh
2 October 2019

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Wayne State University in Detroit spoke to students Monday about the 48,000 General Motors workers who are entering their third week of strike action against the giant transnational corporation and how students can support them.

The IYSSE explained to students that 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.

One freshman finance student addressed himself to the striking workers, saying, “Do not give up your wages and benefits to the corporations,” and denounced the “war on workers and the new generation of workers.” The CEOs and Wall Street, he said, “are trying to take your wages and your benefits and everything you’ve worked hard for. Don’t let them take it away from you. Don’t give in. Stand your ground.”

Angel, a second-year interior design student, told the IYSSE he thinks every worker deserves “not just a decent job but a good job. One with good healthcare, a livable wage and safe working conditions.” IYSSE members emphasized that among the chief demands raised by the older generation of autoworkers was the abolition of the hated multi-tier wage system, which pays new hires half the wage of senior worker, as well as the conversion into full-time employees of all “Temporary Part-Time” workers or TPTs, who can work for years without any set hours or job security.

Angel told us he supports the autoworkers’ fight and thinks all of the major issues workers and youth face today are related. “I think climate change is a major issue. Sometimes I hear people saying that it’s the people’s fault for not recycling or whatever but then you look at these massive companies like GM and I think c’mon, they are the real problem.”

Angel also supported the GM workers in Silao, Mexico who have been fired for courageously refusing to take on extra work while GM workers in the US are on strike. “It’s not right that they were fired. Workers should have the right to speak out; the freedom of speech is the most basic of rights, it is fundamental.”

Another second-year WSU student told us she thinks the strike is “an incredible demonstration of bravery and integrity to be standing up, not just for GM workers but for workers all over the world.” She went on to explain that this fight is critical for young people: “It is important that the younger generation be aware of the fact that all the institutions, and everything we have built can be changed and should be changed to better accommodate the future ahead of us.”

Regarding the victimized Mexican workers, she added, “I give twice as much credit to the Mexican workers. I’m not from Mexico but I can imagine how much more pressure is put on them from the US corporations. The fact that they are sticking to their principles really demonstrates a lot of character.”

Two students visited the IYSSE table who live nearby some of the local auto plants: Mohammed is from Warren, Michigan where GM just shut a transmission plant, and Mahnaz is from Hamtramck, home of GM’s

Detroit-Hamtramck plant, which is slated to close in January.

Both freshmen, the students expressed their full support for the striking autoworkers. Muhammed said, “These big corporations only care about mass production so they can make mass profits. I don't think they have any idea, or even care what effect it has on the workers.”

Mahnaz added: “These companies make billions but so many of them pay their workers ridiculously low wages.” After learning about the conditions facing new contract workers in the auto factories, she commented, “What am I going to do with \$12 hour? Don't try to tell me that's enough to live.” Mahnaz, who is a biology major, agreed that the autoworker struggle would have ramifications for the entire working class. “We need to stop these companies from destroying workers’ lives and the planet.”

The IYSSE members explained that supporting the GM strikes entailed more than just cheering them on. Workers, they said, needed to be told the truth. They were in a fight not only against GM but the capitalist system and both big-business parties, including the Democrats which imposed the conditions GM workers are fighting against during the 2009 restructuring of the auto industry by the Obama administration. Workers were also in a fight against the corrupt United Auto Workers union, which falsely claimed to “represent” them, while taking millions in bribes to slash their wages and benefits.

Far from mobilizing workers and youth in defense of the striking GM workers, the UAW was deliberately isolating them by keeping more than 100,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers on the job, while seeking to starve GM workers back to work with starvation-level strike pay of \$250 a week. Although Wayne State is only a few miles from GM's only factory in the city of Detroit and is also home to the UAW's Walter Reuther Library, the UAW has not organized a single event among students to build support for the striking workers. That is because it is working for the defeat, not the victory of the strike.

IYSSE members explained that they were fighting for autoworkers to build rank-and-file strike and factory committees, independent of the UAW, to break through the isolation, expand the strike throughout the industry, and unify all workers in the US and internationally

against capitalist exploitation and social inequality.

K'von is a second-year student from Detroit who has family members who work for the Big Three auto companies. “The tiered system they have is completely unfair. We should all get equal pay for doing the same work. No one should be treated differently when it comes to pay; they are doing the same job!” We spoke to K'von about the role of the United Auto Workers union, and the dismal strike pay they are offering to workers. “That's not enough money. I think they should be paid at least minimum wage, but probably more.”

K'von added that he felt the working class was the most decisive force in society: “The thing we have to remember is that without us, they've got nothing, and they know it.”

The IYSSE is fighting to mobilize the broadest support for the striking autoworkers and to bring them the perspective of international socialism. We urge youth and students 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.**



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact