“We should all be out”

Growing call for industrywide strike to back GM workers

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Support among Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers for an industrywide strike is growing after the United Auto Workers said that General Motors has not budged from its demands even as the walkout by 48,000 GM workers enters its fourth week.

The announcement from the UAW followed public statements by Wall Street analysts insisting that the company was willing to absorb the short-term losses of a prolonged strike in order to attain its longer-term, strategic aims. This includes gutting health care benefits and tripling the number of low-paid temporary workers. The latter is key to the goal of creating a “more flexible manufacturing workforce” to edge out international competitors for the emerging market of electric and self-driving vehicles and components.

In the face of this historic attack, the UAW has isolated the GM workers and called out less than one-third of the 158,000 workers at Detroit’s Big Three automakers. It has also enforced speedup and forced overtime on the factory floor, helping Ford and Fiat Chrysler stockpile vehicles to offset the impact of any potential strike.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with Fiat Chrysler workers at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) in suburban Detroit during their shift change on Monday afternoon. Many workers expressed their support for an industrywide strike in the brief comments they were able to give before punching in.

“We should all walk,” said one worker on her way to work. “That’s the only way to make them listen. What happens at GM is going to be the template for Fiat Chrysler and Ford.”

Another young worker said, “All of us should be out. It’s the perfect time. The UAW is being hit by the corruption exposure and is in cahoots with the company. It’s time for us to stand up for ourselves,” he said.

A young temporary part-time employee said, “The GM workers are striking for us. It takes a lot of time for us to get a position in the company and a lot of other things. It’s great that they are fighting for us. I think we should all be out.”

Chris, a legacy worker, said he agreed with a united fight by Ford, GM and FCA workers. “I am worried about the strike going on so long. We are all in this together. We should all go out together, everyone. It makes no sense to be separate."

He said he and other workers at the plant had been closely following developments in the UAW corruption scandal. "People can see through the BS," he said referring to UAW claims that the corruption involved only a few "bad apples."

"FCA funneled money through the training centers to the UAW. They are living great lives at our expense." About the secret negotiations, he said, "Why did the UAW start with GM?

"What do they know? We have no idea what is going on."

Chris said that he was particularly concerned about eliminating the tier system and stopping the abuse of temporary part-time workers. "It is hard when they divide us so much with the two-tier wages. They are doing the same work, working side by side for less money.

"I want pensions for everyone, not just for me. I want these jobs to be around; it’s important for the future of our children. We work hard. These CEOs are making millions when they could be paying the workers."

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Two workers discussing the situation with each other in the parking lot called supporters of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* over to one of their cars, saying, “We always look for the newsletter because it is the only thing that gives us any information. The UAW doesn’t tell us anything.”

Her fellow worker said, “We voted by 96 percent to strike, but the UAW said we’re on an indefinite contract extension. We asked the local union officials, ‘Why did we vote to strike if you were going to do what you want to do anyway?’ The vote was just to pacify us,” she said.

Her coworker added, “There is power in numbers, and we all should be out to back the GM workers. Right now, we’re being forced to work and to help the company stockpile vehicles in case there is a strike.

“Why should we pay union dues when the UAW is in bed with the company?

“We all talk to each other in the plant. We know we’re being screwed, and we know who is screwing us. What we want to know is how do we fight? How do we call out all the Fiat Chrysler and Ford workers?”

The supporter of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* explained that workers had to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands because the corrupt and bought-off UAW officials were leading the GM strike to defeat. This meant forming rank-and-file committees in the plant, issuing calls to action to other Ford and Chrysler workers and preparing an industrywide strike to break the isolation of the GM workers and fight to win the strike. At the same time, he said, strike pay had to be tripled to $750 a week.

The workers said the UAW was helping Fiat Chrysler by allowing it to run its factories virtually around the clock and build up its inventory for a potential strike. “That’s what I’ve been telling everybody, the UAW is helping them stockpile vehicles.”

The two workers expressed admiration for and solidarity with the nine Mexican workers at GM’s Silao factory who were framed up and fired because they were leading the fight against GM’s demands to increase production of the company’s highly profitable pickup trucks to undermine the impact of the US strike. The action of the Mexican workers, they noted, had done far more to defend the striking GM workers than the UAW.

The *Newsletter* supporters also informed SHAP workers about the strike that took place at an Italian Fiat Chrysler plant last week after a 40-year-old worker, Fabrizio Greco, was crushed to death while moving a heavy mold near a stamping press. The unions at the factory in the central Italian city of Cassino, which produces several Alfa Romeo models, were forced to call an eight-hour strike after worker anger exploded over the unsafe conditions, which the unions have helped to enforce.

“Wow,” said a worker with seven years at SHAP after hearing about the strike by fellow Fiat Chrysler workers in Italy. “The UAW doesn’t tell us anything. The GM workers are saying the UAW doesn’t even tell them what their demands are.”

Far from uniting autoworkers across borders, the UAW and its counterpart in Canada, the Unifor union and its predecessor the Canadian Auto Workers, have spent decades promoting national chauvinism and blaming workers in Mexico, China and other countries for “stealing” their jobs.

In one such filthy comment, Unifor President Jerry Dias sought to define the GM strike as a fight against Mexican workers. "Ultimately GM's going to have to step out of its comfort zone,” Dias said, “because people are frankly sick and tired of watching our plants being shuttered and our jobs moving to Mexico."

Speaking about the courageous solidarity of the Mexican workers and efforts to divide US and Canadian workers from their brothers and sisters in Mexico, one SHAP worker said, “Our enemies are inside this country, not somewhere else. I’m going to talk to other workers about what the Mexican workers have done for us.”

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