

# The GM strike is a fight against the entire ruling class

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*On Thursday, October 10 at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, the WSWW Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online meeting to discuss the strategy and perspective needed to win the strike. To participate, visit [wsws.org/autocall](https://wsws.org/autocall).*

General Motors' decision to double down on demands to expand temporary work, quintuple workers' health care costs and keep wages growing below the rate of inflation marks a major offensive not only by GM against 48,000 striking autoworkers, but by all of corporate America against the US and international working class.

The ruthlessness of the corporation shows that if the strike is to succeed, workers must take control out of the hands of the UAW and expand the strike. The UAW has isolated workers and weakened their position, paying them \$250 in strike pay and keeping Ford and Fiat-Chrysler workers on the job to help the auto industry withstand the impact of a continued strike.

The strike is causing significant disruptions in international supply chains. Yesterday, GM furloughed 415 of 2,100 workers at its Mexican V-8 engine and transmissions plant in Ramos Arizpe in the northern state of Coahuila. The 6,000-worker Silao, Guanajuato plant remains shut down. Over 10,000 non-UAW members have been laid off at parts and other related facilities in the US as a result of the strike.

The outcome of the strike will determine conditions of life for millions of workers across not just the auto industry, but all workplaces for years to come.

What is involved is not just a dispute with one powerful company. Through this contract, the ruling class is conspiring to dramatically alter class relations and transfer trillions of dollars more from the working class to the financial aristocracy. Autoworkers are

taking a stand for the entire working class.

What GM is trying to force upon its workforce is corporate America's dream vision of the future: an army of temporary workers with no rights who can be thrown onto the street at will; factories that can be shuttered by the company as it wishes; the elimination of employer-provided healthcare; rising productivity through speedup with lower wages and higher injury rates.

GM's demands are an effort by Wall Street to "uberize" and "Amazonify" the international workforce, ensuring the highest possible level of exploitation to increase profits and inflate the stock market. Just yesterday, General Electric announced an end to pensions for 10,000 workers. It is a plan for mass poverty. If successful, the ruling class's strategy will push millions of workers past the brink of physical and mental exhaustion for generations to come.

GM's ruthlessness is not merely the product of corporate "greed," although there is plenty of that to go around. The greed flows from the demands of the capitalist system and the material interests of GM's powerful shareholders.

Seventy-nine percent of GM shares are owned by institutional shareholders, including 7.8 percent by Capital Research and Management, 7.0 percent by Vanguard, 5.0 percent by Berkshire Hathaway and 4.3 percent by BlackRock.

According to a 2017 study published in the journal *Business and Politics*, the world's top three institutional investors—Vanguard, State Street and BlackRock—"are the largest shareholder of 1,662 of the 3,900 publicly traded US corporations accounting for... 78 percent of the total market capitalization of US firms," including GM. These companies have "a current market capitalization of more than \$17 trillion,

possess assets worth almost \$23.9 trillion, and employ more than 23.5 million people.”

The study concluded that the three most powerful institutional investors “occupy a position of unrivaled potential power over corporate America,” and that there is “a concentration of corporate ownership not seen since the days of JP Morgan and JD Rockefeller.” The top three “have the potential to cause significant changes to the political economy of the United States.”

That is exactly what Wall Street is seeking to accomplish through the GM contract.

Workers must draw strategic conclusions from these facts.

The immediate first step must be to form rank-and-file factory committees to expand the strike to Ford and Fiat-Chrysler. Workers are at war with the corporations and must therefore prepare reinforcements to do battle against them.

The strike pay must be tripled to \$750 per week. This is necessary to sustain a real fight. This can be paid for with the \$800 million strike fund and by forcing a pay freeze on all UAW officials, especially the over 450 officials who make over \$100,000 per year and are receiving full pay during the strike.

Workers must then set their own demands. For decades, workers have been told they must subordinate their demands to “market realities.” On this basis, hundreds of factories have been closed, millions of jobs have been lost, and wages have been brought down to levels that preceded the historic auto strikes of the 1930s.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on workers to demand the following:

- A 40 percent pay raise, the restoration of COLA for current and retired workers, the abolition of the two-tier wage and benefit system and the immediate conversion of all temps into full-time workers with full wages and benefits.
- The reopening of the Lordstown, Warren and Baltimore plants, a halt to all plant closings and the rehiring of all laid-off workers.
- The reinstatement of all the fired and victimized workers at GM’s Silao, Mexico plant and the payment of all back pay. These heroic workers were fired for refusing to increase production of GM’s highly profitable pickup trucks during the US strike. Their defense is the greatest way to forge the unity of US,

Canadian and Mexican workers and undermine the corporations’ strategy of pitting workers against each other in a race to the bottom.

The UAW will not and cannot put forward any of these demands because doing so would undermine their criminal and corrupt relationship with the corporations.

Workers must disabuse themselves of the notion that the UAW will be forced to fight under pressure from workers. The opposite is true: the greater the workers’ anger and resolve, the harder the UAW will work with the companies behind their backs to end the strike and defend the interests of the corporations.

Carrying forward workers’ demands therefore requires new, rank-and-file organizations. These organizations will facilitate workers’ sharing information with one another, allow them to reach decisions democratically and to act in unison in carrying those decisions out.

They will function as synapses in a political nervous system, spreading into all workplaces and schools and connecting workers across national boundaries, allowing the working class to think and act as a powerful united social force against the companies and the capitalist system.

The fate of the GM strike and of the lives of hundreds of millions of workers depends on GM workers establishing committees and taking control of their struggle.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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