

Mack Truck, copper miners, Chicago teachers, gig economy workers

Spreading strike wave shows potential for GM workers to expand struggle to Ford and Fiat-Chrysler

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14 October 2019

As 48,000 General Motors workers complete one month on strike to win back lost wages and benefits, end the hated tier system, secure permanent status for all temps and defeat attacks on health care, they are being reinforced by new battalions of the working class entering into struggle.

The critical issue they face is breaking the isolation imposed by the United Auto Workers and extending the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler as the first step in mobilizing the working class across the US and internationally against the drive by the international banks and corporations to reduce workers to at-will temps with no rights and poverty wages.

The current GM strike is now the longest national auto strike since GM workers struck for 67 days in 1970. A measure of the treachery of the UAW is the fact that 460,000 GM workers struck in the last national strike as compared to less than 50,000 today.

The conditions for broadening the auto strike exist. After the UAW kept them on the job for weeks after the contract expiration, 3,500 Mack-Volvo truck manufacturing workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida walked off the job on Sunday in their first strike in 35 years.

Workers at Mack-Volvo, as well as their counterparts at Daimler-Freightliner and Navistar, face the exact same issues as workers at GM and the rest of the automakers: global restructuring by giant multinationals striving to dominate electric and autonomous vehicle markets, more than a decade of declining wages despite record company profits, and two-tier and temporary labor schemes enforced by the UAW.

In addition to the Mack-Volvo strike, more than 2,000 copper miners and smelter workers in Arizona and Texas, members of the United Steelworkers union, were set to strike late last night and this morning against Asarco, the world's third largest copper producer, which is owned by

giant conglomerate Grupo Mexico. The workers rejected the company's "last and final offer," which included no wage increase for workers who have not had a raise in 11 years, whose pensions have been frozen and whose out-of-pocket health care expenses have more than doubled.

In Chicago, more than 20,000 teachers have voted to strike Thursday over stagnating wages, higher health care contributions and decades of budget cuts and school closures overseen by the Democratic Party. The Chicago Teachers Union is seeking to block a strike and has already dropped the teachers' main demands on staffing and classroom size.

In a sign of struggles to come, a group of workers for the grocery delivery app Instacart are organizing a nationwide strike November 3-5 to demand that the company restore its old tipping policies. Anger is also growing against Amazon, which abruptly canceled its contracts with three major delivery firms, putting more than 2,000 people out of work.

Behind GM stands Wall Street, which wants to reduce all workers to the status of at-will employees like those at Instacart, Amazon and other "gig economy" firms. For the financial elite, the workforce of the future will be nothing more than industrial slaves whose every move is electronically monitored and whose pay and employment status depend on the vagaries of the stock market.

Moody's Investors Service, Standard & Poor's and other Wall Street credit rating agencies have walked back previous threats to downgrade GM, with Moody's telling investors that GM has "adequate liquidity to contend with a strike of this duration." Moody's vice president said GM needs a UAW contract that preserves "operating flexibility" and allows GM to invest in electric and autonomous vehicles. This means closing the wage gap, he said, with Asian and European-owned auto companies that operate non-union plants in the US, which already "results in more than \$1 billion per year in higher costs (and lower profits) for GM."

As Bloomberg business news commented: “It’s fitting that this is what the strike has ultimately come down to: a collision of 20th-century expectations for job security with a 21st-century technology arms race against foreign competitors that enjoy lower labor costs or higher productivity.”

GM workers are fighting not just one giant corporation. They are fighting the capitalist profit system, which subordinates every aspect of life, and life itself, to the enrichment of the financial aristocracy. And behind Wall Street stand the Trump administration and the corporate-controlled Democrats and Republicans. Whatever their bitter disputes over foreign policy, both big business parties are determined to escalate the attack on the working class in order to prop up the stock market and increase the personal fortunes of the rich.

The media is already floating the possibility of a strike-breaking intervention by the Trump administration. In comments to the *Detroit Free Press*, Wayne State University Professor Marick Masters said, “In theory, if the president were to declare a national emergency, they would have to go to mediation.”

The fact that GM workers are fighting the entire capitalist class and its government makes their struggle not only economic, but also political.

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The conditions exist for a powerful industrial and political counter-offensive of the working class. There is widespread support for the GM strikers and opposition to wage-cutting, austerity and social inequality, as well as war and the threat of dictatorship.

The biggest obstacle to unifying the struggles of the working class is the UAW and the other unions, which have colluded with the corporations for decades. Nearly one-month into the GM strike, the UAW continues to force Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers to remain on the job, with union officials acting as strikebreakers by helping the automakers stockpile vehicles.

At the same time, the UAW is keeping workers on starvation-level strike pay. The weekly increase of \$25 per week is an insult to GM workers who have sacrificed for nearly a month, while UAW President Gary Jones continues to draw his entire salary of \$230,000. His weekly salary of \$5,004 is nearly 20 times the \$275 a week the UAW is forcing strikers and their families to subsist on.

Despite the flurry of secret meetings with CEO Mary Barra, the reported proposals and counterproposals, the UAW continues to keep rank-and-file workers in the dark. That is because more than anything else, the UAW fears that if workers learned what it has already agreed to give up, it

would face a full-scale revolt by the rank and file.

The UAW has agreed to GM’s demand for a vast expansion of temps, sugar-coated with the worthless pledge of a three-year path to permanent status. It has also agreed to maintain the two-tier system, continue the decades-long erosion of workers’ real income and reduction in health and pension benefits. GM has threatened to close the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources—the pipeline for corporate payoffs to the union executives—to increase the pressure on the UAW to impose a historical contract betrayal over the mass opposition of the workers.

If this struggle is to be won—and it can be won—autoworkers must take the fight into their own hands and radically change course. This means building rank-and-file strike and factory committees, led by the most militant and trusted workers. A network of committees should be established to expand the walkout to Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers as part of the fight to shut down the entire auto and auto parts industry. To sustain the fight, autoworkers must demand the tripling of strike benefits to \$750 a week by making the entire strike fund of nearly \$800 million available to workers and reducing the salaries of all UAW officials to strike pay.

Rank-and-file committees of autoworkers should link up with all workers—truck workers, teachers, copper miners, logistic workers and others—to prepare a general strike against austerity and social inequality. They must reject the anti-Mexican chauvinism of the UAW and unify with workers across all borders, including the heroic workers at GM’s Silao plant, who have been fired and victimized for refusing to increase production during the US strike.



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