

The GM strike and the global class struggle

Marcus Day
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This week, the strike by 48,000 US General Motors workers has reached a crossroads. The United Auto Workers is trying to shut down the strike on the company's terms, demanding that workers approve a contract that would shutter the Lordstown, Ohio, assembly plant and two other factories and enable GM to vastly expand its highly-exploited temporary workforce.

The bribe-taking UAW officials are hoping they can bully workers into accepting yet another concessions contract. They are prepared to stuff ballots, as they did in 2015, or use any other means to get the contract through.

Despite the efforts of "Solidarity House" to make the workers feel isolated and powerless in the face of the giant multinational corporation, the striking workers have immense support.

The GM workers strike is part of a wave of social struggles throughout the United States and around the world. Immense opportunities are opening up for autoworkers to expand their fight by reaching out to other sections of the international working class.

* On Thursday, over 32,000 teachers and public school workers in Chicago, America's third-largest city, launched their second major strike since 2012, demanding adequate staffing and resources. The Chicago Teachers Union's President Jesse Sharkey has said the CTU intends to keep the strike "short-term," hoping to allow teachers to blow off steam before the union betrays their demands.

* Over 3,500 Mack Trucks workers, who are also in the UAW, remain on strike in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Florida, along with nearly 2,000 copper miners in Arizona and Texas. The strike at Mack has begun to impact operations at Volvo, Mack's parent, with Volvo's New River Valley factory in Virginia, its largest producer of commercial trucks, set to idle on Monday.

* Train service was disrupted throughout France Friday and Saturday by strikes, as workers for the state SNCF protested understaffing and unsafe conditions. The impromptu strikes were galvanized by a train accident Wednesday, in which the driver, the sole SNCF agent on board, was forced to walk miles afterwards to call for help for 11 injured passengers.

* In Chile, protests that began last Monday exploded on Friday into mass demonstrations over the government's four percent public transit fare hike. President Sebastian Pinera's attempt to quell the demonstrations by rescinding the hike had yet to have the intended effect as of Sunday and the Chilean military extended a night-time curfew in Santiago, the country's capital.

* And in Lebanon, mass protests demanding the resignation of the government continued into the weekend, sparked by anger over bleak economic conditions, austerity measures and tax hikes, including plans implement a tax on messaging app WhatsApp.

All around the world, workers and youth are being driven into struggle by the same basic issues: stagnating wages, lack of job security, spiraling costs of living, and, above all, the malignant growth of social inequality.

The recent increase in strike activity in the US, after being suppressed for decades by the trade unions, has prompted nervous rumblings by the *New York Times*, one of the primary mouthpieces for Wall Street.

In an article Sunday, "In a Strong Economy, Why Are So Many Workers on Strike?," the *Times* mused on the "paradox" that even though the economy is in "a 10-year winning streak," with corporations raking in near-record profits, "workers appear increasingly willing to walk off the job."

The reality, which the *Times* is incapable of openly admitting, is that the last decade's "winning streak" of trillions in new wealth for the corporate and financial

elite has been entirely *based on* increasing the exploitation of the working class. This process has brewed mass anger and now open opposition.

The miserable conditions workers are now fighting against, whether in the US, Europe, Latin America or elsewhere, have been enacted by the capitalist political parties, relying on the support of the trade unions.

During the restructuring of GM and Chrysler in 2009, the administration of Democratic President Barack Obama collaborated with the UAW in halving the wages of new hires, expanding the wage and benefit tier system and shutting down countless plants. In Chicago in 2012, the CTU shut down a powerful teachers' strike just at the point it was coming into conflict with the Democratic Party, paving the way for the closure of nearly 50 schools and the layoff of thousands of teachers.

In the US, a bipartisan policy of social counterrevolution has been carried out over the last 40 years, which the working class is now coming into struggle against.

Supposedly "left" Democrats, such as presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are completely opposed to any movement that threatens to emerge outside the control of the unions and the Democratic Party. This was demonstrated in a rally in New York over the weekend, in which neither Sanders nor Ocasio-Cortez mentioned once any of the strikes by tens of thousands of workers currently taking place.

The Democrats are terrified by the growth of the class struggle no less than the Republicans. In their conflicts with Trump over foreign policy, they are basing themselves on the military and intelligence agencies, seeking to utilize palace coup methods and prevent the mobilization of opposition from below.

With a new economic recession on the horizon and geopolitical tensions metastasizing into military conflicts, all the bourgeois politicians will respond to the growth of mass social struggles not with progressive reforms, but with class war and dictatorial measures.

The central task is to unite the emerging struggles of workers around the world into a struggle against capitalism. As videos and other information about mass demonstrations in country after country break through on social media and make their way into social

consciousness, workers are coming to realize that they share the same basic interests, regardless of age, race, gender or nationality.

The organic tendencies towards international solidarity—demonstrated in the courageous support of GM workers in Silao, Mexico, for the strike in the US—and a desire for social equality must be transformed into a conscious movement for international socialism.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on GM workers to vote "no" on the agreement, form rank-and-file factory committees and take control of the strike, removing it from the hands of the UAW.

In seeking to defend their interests, workers are objectively coming into conflict with capitalism and its political representatives. What is needed is a strategy and leadership which fights for the international unity of the working class and its independence from all the parties and representatives of the ruling class.

The Socialist Equality Party and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, are spearheading this fight. We call on all those who agree with this perspective to make the decision to join and build the SEP and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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