

Unite educators and all workers behind the autoworkers' strike! End poverty wages and unsafe conditions!

Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (US)
19 September 2023

The strike by autoworkers against the Big Three automakers is part of a growing international wave of struggles against inflation, concessions and job losses. Over 97 percent of the 150,000 United Auto Workers (UAW) members voted to strike upon the expiration of their contract last week, joined by another 98 percent of the 18,000 Canadian autoworkers who authorized a strike. They are just part of an escalating struggle by industrial workers around the world.

Teachers and other educators are a key component of this developing global movement which includes nurses, municipal workers, graduate student instructors, hotel workers, actors, writers and many more. Significant sections of the American population who previously considered themselves “middle class” have become proletarianized, confronting the same questions of exploitation, declining wages and precarious employment as workers everywhere. In short, we are all in the same struggle.

What is at stake in the autoworkers' strike?

As one young autoworker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “It’s about equality. We spend a lot of time away from our families and we want to be treated equally. We have workers four years who have been TPTs [temporary part-time]. We slave each and every day and we can’t afford the cars we are building.”

During the 2008-09 Wall Street bailout orchestrated by the Obama administration, the federal government insisted on cutting the wages of autoworkers in half. An army of “tiered” part-time, low-paid workers—many of whom earn less than workers at McDonald’s or other fast food companies—have since been hired in. This has led to record-setting profits for the Big Three automakers, who raked in combined profits of \$22.5 billion over the first six months of 2023.

It should also be noted that the Obama administration similarly eliminated the jobs of approximately 300,000 educators, slashing special education and Title I funding across the US.

Another worker told the WSWS, “We want everything back we lost in bankruptcy, including pensions. We are fighting for all workers.”

These problems are all too familiar for educators, who are suffering from a 24 percent “pay penalty” compared with similarly educated workers, face steep increases in healthcare costs and continue to work in unsafe, poorly-ventilated schools as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage. Just as educators face a tsunami of budget cuts and layoffs as pandemic funding dries up, autoworkers face mass layoffs with the market-driven transition to electronic vehicles (EVs).

The union apparatus is sabotaging the autoworkers' strike

The UAW bureaucracy, headed by Shawn Fain and supported by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has enforced a so-called “stand-up strike” against the will of the rank and file, limiting the strike to only three plants across the entire US and just 5 percent of the total workforce.

A Toledo Jeep worker told the WSWS, “The CEOs are demonstrating their arrogance and greed for the whole world to see. But calling out less than 10 percent of rank-and-file workers is allowing them to continue making money.

“There is widespread frustration at the facilities still working because those workers were part of the 97 percent of the members who voted to strike. At the same time, this ‘stand-up strike’ has handed power to management to fire anyone for any reason because there are virtually no protections under an expired contract.”

In fact, Fain and the UAW bureaucrats have already agreed to the destruction of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of autoworkers’ jobs. It is only seeking a deal that will allow the union bureaucracy to preserve its financial and institutional interests, including being able to collect dues from workers in the new EV plants who will be paid poverty wages.

The toothless “walkout” is nothing but a sham orchestrated at the highest levels of government in the White House. The Biden administration has carefully monitored the situation and is in daily communication with the UAW leadership. Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and senior adviser Gene Sperling are being sent to Detroit to “offer their full support” for a deal to end the strike. Su was

intimately involved in blocking the rail workers' strike last year, while Sperling served on Obama's auto task force that restructured the industry in 2009.

The Democratic Party has likewise recently imposed concessionary contracts on teachers in Detroit, Michigan and in Camas and Evergreen, Washington; graduate student instructors at the University of California and University of Michigan; UPS workers; rail workers and more.

In the Clark County School District (CCSD) in Las Vegas, the fifth largest district in the US with over 300,000 students, local Democrats and DSA members are working with union officials to try to suppress an incipient rebellion of rank-and-file educators, who face among the worst conditions of any school district in the country.

Notably, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president and Democratic National Committee member Randi Weingarten, as well as National Association of Educators (NEA) president Becky Pringle, have both endorsed the toothless "stand-up strike" tactic.

Signaling her intent to use this method to contain the growing rebellion of educators, Weingarten recently tweeted, "Not sure what a 'stand up' strike means? No problem!" and linked to an FAQ page on the official UAW website.

Underscoring the pro-corporate character of the "stand-up strike," Wall Street has largely shrugged off the UAW's ineffective action, with the auto companies' stocks rising after the strike began Friday.

Reuters reported that the strike could actually help GM address ongoing technical and operational issues in its EV and battery operations. Sam Fiorani, vice president of global vehicle forecasting at AutoForecast Solutions, commented, "A production stoppage could allow GM to solve bottlenecks. GM could ramp up output faster once the factories start running again."

Educators must join autoworkers and build rank-and-file committees!

As educators know, the AFT and NEA have worked hand in glove with the Democrats for years to sabotage our struggles and prevent coordinated national action on pay, working conditions and COVID safety. In return, the Democrats ensure the bureaucracies' legal right to collect millions in dues.

Already this school year, thousands of teachers, bus drivers and other school workers have struck or authorized strike action in districts across the US. Like our brothers and sisters in the auto plants, we have had enough of the decades-long attacks on our social rights and living standards!

We must form our own committees of rank-and-file workers to demand our rights, share our experiences and link our struggles together. This fight must be based on the knowledge that the union bureaucracy, just like the politicians of both parties, answers not to workers, but to the ruling elites. We must base ourselves on the overwhelming power of the working class and we must fight independently.

Will Lehman, a leader of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee who ran for UAW president last year, explained what this means in a recent statement issued to workers across the country. Calling on workers to form rank-and-file committees in every factory, elect leaders from the shop floor and communicate with each other, Lehman said, "For there to be an all-out strike—which is what workers want—the rank and file ourselves will have to organize and prepare it."

Educators, this historic strike by autoworkers has many lessons for us. Above all, it makes clear that we must assemble our own leadership from the rank-and-file and unite with workers everywhere.

As Lehman wrote in an editorial published in Newsweek on Monday, "There is an approaching day of reckoning with social realities that have long been concealed and covered up. Workers are increasingly aware of the vastly unequal society in which they live and are looking for a way to change it..."

"What Biden, Trump, and Fain all fear is that inequality is driving the working class in the United States towards socialist politics—that is, a political perspective based upon workers' independent class interests.

"Capitalism is showing masses of workers that it is at war with their basic needs. Inflation, the unrestrained transmission of COVID-19, deadly working conditions, the climate crisis, and the threat of nuclear world war are confronting workers all over the world. More and more workers are seeing the need to overturn this entire system and bring about one in which social need, not private profit, determine how society's resources are organized."

Educators have been central to this growing radicalization of the international working class ever since the powerful 2018 wildcat strike in West Virginia, and we will play a critical role in the struggles that lie ahead. We call on our colleagues across the US and internationally to join and build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees today to prepare the necessary leadership for these coming struggles!



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