

“We all should be on strike at the same time”: Ford Chicago workers speak out from the picket lines

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Work at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, the Big Three or in the parts plants? We want to hear from you: Fill out the form at the end of the article to tell us about your demands and what you're fighting for.

Over 4,600 workers at Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant went on strike and joined the picket lines on Friday determined to fight. At the same time, the United Auto Workers bureaucracy continues to keep over 80 percent of its members at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis working without a contract, despite a 97 percent strike authorization vote.

In speaking to reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers at the Ford assembly plant on the Far South Side of Chicago expressed their readiness to fight for significant increases to wages, cost-of-living raises, the restoration of pensions, fully-funded healthcare, as well as more time to spend with their families.

A number of the striking Ford Chicago workers also expressed their support for the strategy called for by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to expand the struggle in an all-out strike in the auto industry to win their demands.

“We live paycheck to paycheck”

Chanda, a Ford worker with over a decade of experience at the Chicago Assembly Plant, spoke out about her demands. “We want a livable wage,” she said. “We want the temporary workers to get paid what they are worth. We want retirees to get what they are worth. Just pay us! That's what we want.

“We want to be able to live and be able to provide for our families comfortably. We have to go paycheck to paycheck. I'm a single mother. I have two kids at home. Pay us so we can get back to work and keep making these quality vehicles that they are boasting about.”

“It's 5,000 employees that come in here every single day to make these quality vehicles,” she added, while Ford “is seeing the profits”

Emanuel, another striking Ford worker said, “We're fighting for our fair share of the record profits that the company is making. We are in this plant almost 11 hours a day, four days a week. We're here more than we have time to spend with our families and loved ones. So, that's basically what we are fighting for.”

“We are asking for a 40 percent raise, for more time off, for full medical benefits, dental, vision, all of that should come with it when the company is making record profits.”

Michael, a worker with over 13 years at Ford CAP, said, “We are fighting for better pay, the end of tiers, to bring back our pensions and for better time off so we can have more time to spend with our families. With all the inflation things have very much changed. For my family it's probably \$300 just for groceries alone. Gas in the car is like \$60. It's kind of tough sometimes.”

“Gas, food, everything is very expensive”

Jahlil, a worker with four years at the plant said, “We need more money to get paid. The work that we do is very strenuous on the body. It's time consuming. You don't have a lot of time with your family, especially if you work nights.

“As far as cost of living, gas, food, everything is very expensive—covering bills and helping family out,” he added. “I have a kid, she's four. It's expensive to feed her, expensive to buy her clothes, pay for school, for everything that she needs.

“Ford makes a lot of money off these cars. I know how many cars we touch at night and I know how much the cars are. I touch 600 cars a night and these are \$80,000–\$90,000 cars. This is my first time having to go against a job this hard to just get what I need. I want to get a definite better pay rate, at least \$40 per hour for the stuff we do.”

When reporters noted that if the 2022 profits of the Big Three were divided up among all 150,000 autoworkers it would provide a \$500,000 bonus, Jahlil was outraged.

“\$500,000 a year? And I've probably seen \$60k this year. You're telling me if all the profits among the Big Three were divided up, we'd have \$500,000? That's wild. Now I really want to stand out here.”

“I've only worked here four years and I wake up and my hand is balled up,” he said, pointing to his hands. “We touch 600 cars a night, do the same job 600 times a night.

“Your back, your body, hips, knees...if we don't have the benefits later on after retirement it's going to be a problem for me. I went ahead and broke my body and now y'all don't want to help me on the back end?”

“We have to work 400 years to make one year of what the CEOs

make”

Ian is a transplanted autoworker who has experienced decades of concessions and plant closures that the bureaucracy did nothing to stop. He spoke on the devastating impact this had on thousands of autoworkers.

“I started at the Atlanta Assembly Plant,” Ian said. “I started working there in 1995. We built the Taurus and the Mercury Sables. Then in 2006, they announced the closing of the plant. We had to move to Louisville. I was at Louisville Assembly for 10 years. Then they transferred me up here.”

“In 2008-2009, they were closing up a lot of plants. You could tell in Louisville alone, there was over 300 of us who had to transfer. It was hard on a lot of us. A lot of people didn’t want to move; they were used to that area. It was rough. With inflation, it’s getting worse and worse. It used to be a comfortable job. I miss a day now, I’m late on rent. It’s rough.

“We haven’t gotten a decent raise in over 20 years. It’s a whole lot worse now, especially in Chicago. Cost of living in Chicago is a lot higher than in Louisville.

“Cost of living [raises] is one of our top demands, number one up there,” Ian said, echoing all the other workers on the pickets. “And to get a raise. There was one year we got zero profit sharing. And the companies are making record-breaking profits. We haven’t seen any of that.

“We should be making about \$40 an hour by now if it had kept up with inflation. My pay should be around \$42-43. Even our healthcare went down. It used to be 100 percent, we had to pay nothing. Everything was covered. We gave that up just to help them out. It’s not where it was. They don’t want to give it back. How does that make any sense?

“CEOs get their bonuses, we don’t get any,” Ian added. “We have to work 400 years to make one year of what they make? That’s insane! We’re the ones pumping out these cars, making our numbers. It’s our blood and sweat in these cars. And we haven’t gotten anything to show for it. The divide is huge.

“I’m proud of being part of this strike. It’s historic.”

Laid-off Lear worker: “UAW bargaining team will not listen to their members’ demands, yet is too cowardly to strike”

Over the weekend, at least 330 workers at the nearby Ford Chicago Stamping Plant and the Lima Engine Plant were laid off as a direct consequence of the isolated strike strategy of the UAW bureaucracy and its president Shawn Fain.

The UAW’s phony “stand up strike” has been met with by corporate media and investors with a collective shrug, as the most profitable plants of the Big Three remain untouched while workers are paying the price.

UAW members at the Lear plant in Hammond, Indiana, who supply seats to Ford Chicago Assembly, have also been laid off as a consequence of Fain’s “stand-up” strike strategy. Fain has maintained a total silence on the rebellion by Lear workers, who have rejected three UAW-backed contracts in recent weeks.

A Lear worker told the WSWS, “Lear’s UAW union bargaining team will not listen to their members’ demands, yet is too cowardly to strike. Members are being denied our strike pay of \$500 per week and have to settle for Indiana unemployment of \$390 per week. This is due to the strike at the nearby Ford Motor Company in South Chicago.”

Another frustrated Lear worker with 12 years added, “I’m tired of being treated like I’m not human by companies that act like begging is normal.”

Ford workers determined to fight: “It’s time we stand up. It’s now or never.”

Workers at Ford’s Chicago Assembly also expressed their desire for an all-out strike, criticizing the UAW’s extremely limited “stand-up strikes.”

Chicago Ford Assembly worker Michael said, “We’re doing the strike in different areas, but I really think that if we put everyone out at once it would really put the pressure on them to hurry up and make a contract or give us an offer that we actually deserve.”

Ian also spoke of the need for an all-out strike. “If this strike doesn’t prove it to them, then other plants should follow suit. The F-150 plant, the truck plants in Kentucky. That should make the companies feel it.”

Ricky, another Chicago Ford worker, added, “I’m tired of living check to check. From a carton of eggs to whatever you need—everything’s overly expensive. We deserve more. It’s time we stand up. It’s either now or never. Not just for us, but the people coming behind us, for the future. We’re working for a multi-billion dollar company. The money is there. It’s just unacceptable.

“We gotta do what we gotta do,” he added about the need for an all-out strike. “I’m all in. We gotta hit them where it hurts—in their pockets. We all should be on strike at the same time... The way [Fain]’s going about it, it’s not really affecting [the companies]. We need to do it as soon as possible.”



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