
GM workers:

STRIKE TO WIN!

The auto workers' strike against GM is the *real* road to making America great again. The main danger is settling for too little, too soon.

The GM strike: an historic struggle

A turning point—exposing the lie of the “master-slave partnership”

BAMN salutes the UAW GM workers who are changing history. You have the power to alter the direction of this nation and to pull us out of the dark days of labor concessions, the tremendous weakening of the unions, pervasive racism, immigration bashing and divisiveness that have left our nation a barely recognizable shadow of what it once was and what we want it to be. This strike allows us to shed the whole fallacy that American workers could form a joint partnership with GM management on a ‘nationalist’ basis that would benefit both the corporation and the workers.

The joint partnership with GM has been like being partners with the school-yard bully whom you submit to because you believe he is so much more powerful than you are. Every day at recess in the

school yard he put his arm over your shoulder and mockingly calls you “partner” or says “thank you, friend” while you give him your lunch and spare change, scared to defy him. When you are a kid, you learned that while you may not be able to beat the bully by yourself, if you gather up a group of friends, you can humiliate him, show his weakness and, of course, knock him out cold. Well, this finally our opportunity to say to GM: we are no longer your subservient pretend friend and partner. We are so much stronger than our numbers. GM workers have the backing of millions of Americans. GM only has a handful of rich and arrogant bullies, including Donald Trump, on their side.

The groundbreaking potential of the GM workers' strike

The GM strike is groundbreaking in two ways—it is a fight to restore the standard of living of auto workers, and it is quickly becoming an international workers' struggle against one of the world's most powerful companies. This is the only

auto strike since the Great Depression to focus on pay equity and on restoring the legacy and tradition of union struggle to assure that young auto workers can have the middle-class incomes and lifestyles that have been the hallmark of UAW achievements since World War II.

GM workers' historically important demands

The two most popular and prominent demands of the strike are: (1) keeping open the four U.S. GM plants facing closure, and (2) ending the two-tier wage system. The demand to make temp workers into permanent GM employees receiving equal pay and benefits is another central demand of the strike. Over the last decade, auto workers have taken losses in benefits, especially for retirees, and in the base wage rates of high-seniority auto workers and, while still important, those issues are not the do-or-die bargaining points of this contract fight. No other auto worker strike since the 1930's has been so decisively driven by our union's recognition that equality and fairness are

of paramount importance to our union's future and to the future of this nation. To create the UAW in the first place, to win anything, and to stay alive as a union, the UAW had to take on and defeat GM's ability to pit black and white workers against each other. The UAW understands workers can no longer allow the automakers to divide younger and older workers doing the same work, day after day.

This strike is first and foremost about returning dignity, hope, and prosperity to American auto workers for generations to come. If GM workers win now, they will set an example for the whole American labor movement for how to fight and win. In reality, this strike has the potential of bringing a dying American labor movement back to life.

The reality of international labor solidarity—the alternative to the bosses' trade wars and "free trade" at the expense of workers

The second distinguishing feature of this strike is that it is already an international action of GM workers and could quickly become the first major international workers' strike against a huge and powerful multinational company.

BAMN salutes the nearly 5,000 Canadian GM workers who are being laid-off because of our strike but are steadfast in their support for our action. Our Canadian brothers and sisters are members of Unifor, the sister union to the UAW. GM has already stated that it plans to close down its plant in Oshawa, Ontario and is considering closing other Canadian GM operations. Our fight to keep the GM plants open in the United States has become a fight to keep GM plants in Canada open. Our Canadian brothers and sisters want us to be intransigent and pave the way for a victory for them.

BAMN salutes the Mexican workers who slave for GM every day on wages less than \$3 an hour. Mexican auto workers are barred from organizing independent unions. Many have already been fired for declaring their support for our strike. There is a huge GM complex in Silao, Mexico, which employs 10,000 workers who work under slave-like conditions for near-starvation pay rates. If our strike goes for another week, the Silao plants will shut down. Unlike our Canadian brothers and sisters, our Mexican brothers and sisters will receive no public benefits when their plants close. Still, they support our struggle and pray for us to win.

The Mexican auto workers understand one of the most basic and fundamental principles of trade unionism,

which is that no matter what the sacrifice, all workers must stand together if we want to defeat our common enemy: the owners and bosses of General Motors. They hear all company and political propaganda that American workers are striking to take their jobs, but they know that the only winner of war between American and Mexican workers is GM. If the UAW wins this strike, it is the hope of our Mexican brothers and sisters that the UAW might gain the leverage to win gains for them, at the very least back their fight for their own union. It is obvious that GM is making more than enough money to equalize the pay of their workers across the borders of North America. In the end, all workers stand to gain by a UAW victory in this strike, which is why GM workers in America are inspiring GM workers in other countries to fight.

BAMN salutes the GM workers in Korea, who walked out on September 9th. After months of impasse, GM and the unions came up with a tentative agreement. Korean GM workers are scared of losing their jobs to Chinese GM workers, and are saying that they will not vote for an agreement that does not give them job protection. In China, which is now the largest market for GM vehicles, Chinese workers have been making demonstrations about their low pay and terrible working conditions. Chinese workers, too, are becoming restless and ready to strike.

With the continuing international spread of this kind of struggle, this strike could be the first victorious international workers' strike against a multinational boss that has made billions by keeping us divided and fighting among ourselves. This would be a great victory for the American and international working classes.

Local labor solidarity and community support

BAMN salutes the 850 Aramark janitors and maintenance workers, who were the first GM UAW workers who went on strike a couple of days before the main strike began. There was no way that GM auto workers were going to accept scabbing on their co-workers in the plants. Aramark workers made our strike an inevitability. Until recently, they were under the national GM auto workers' agreement. Sons and daughters of GM workers doing the same job that their parents did when they worked for GM and were under the GM auto workers' contract are making half as much as their parents did because their jobs were subcontracted to Aramark. So long as the UAW union lead-

ership stands on the principle that no one settles until everyone settles, they can be restored to the wage rates they lost a few years ago.

Community support for the GM strikers has been broad and deep. Every day, hundreds of UAW members from non-GM plants, members of other unions, high school and college students, and members of a broad alliance of community, neighborhood, religious, and educational and charitable groups have joined picket lines and poured out their hearts in support for the strikers.

The picket lines have been a rallying point for the best and most progressive people from all backgrounds—from all generations, races, nationalities, and religions. The strike against GM has shown the way to unite a divided nation in support of a just cause.

The basic issues of the strike

Job creation and new investments

General Motors came to the bargaining table in September asking for major healthcare concessions from GM auto workers. They proposed having us pay for 15% rather than 3-4% of our health benefits costs. That proposal was defeated just by the threat that we would go on strike, and it is no longer on the table. GM is claiming that it will spend \$7 billion in new U.S. investments and that it will be investing in 5,400 jobs. Half the jobs that GM is claiming that it will create already exist. Only half of the 5,400 jobs will be new jobs. Between June 30, 2018 and June 30, 2019, GM made over \$15 billion in profit. They have made record profits over the last decade. Spending \$7 billion over the next 4 years on U.S. plants is a pittance of what they have and what we deserve.

Two-tier wage system

In 2007, a two-tier wage system was created. Workers hired before 2007 are referred to as "legacy" workers who make between \$28-33 per hour. GM workers hired after 2007 begin at about \$16 per hour. After eight years, these workers can, under certain conditions, earn \$28 an hour. Both GM legacy workers and those hired after 2007 have seen wages, when adjusted for inflation, drop by 16% since 2010. GM is offering profit-sharing and lump sum wage increases for two years of the contract, and 2% wage increases for two years of the contract.

Temporary workers comprise about

10% of the GM work force. These workers make \$15 per hour and have no job security. GM wants to increase the number of temporary workers. The UAW is fighting to have the temporary workers reclassified as permanent employees. It is worth noting that GM CEO Mary T. Barra is paid about \$22 million dollars a year, which is a mere 281 times more than the median pay rate of GM auto workers. In reality, every auto worker has contributed more blood, sweat, and tears to the success of GM than Mary T. Barra will have contributed in a lifetime of unearned bonuses and luxury lifestyle.

Plant closings

GM is currently threatening to close four plants in the United States. The UAW is demanding that all four plants remain open and that the workers who are or were employed prior to their closing be guaranteed the right to maintain their jobs.

The next phase of the struggle: securing a real victory

Shutting down the operations at every GM plant; stopping scabs

At most plants, other unions—including the Teamsters, the Longshore workers, and Railroad workers have supported the GM UAW strike and refused to cross the picket lines. In two locations, Springhill, Tennessee, and Phoenix, Arizona, trucks have tried to cross the picket lines to take out supplies. At least ten people at the Springhill, Tennessee plants have been arrested for trying to stop the scab trucks from coming in. GM has now gotten a national injunction to prevent UAW picketers from blocking the entry and exit ways of their plants.

For the strike to win, it will be essential for the supporters of the strike to follow examples like the efforts of the Springhill, Tennessee strikers to deny scabs access to the plants. In the course of any strike, some workers will give way to pressure to return to work as the strike seems to drag on and an ending point seems unclear. Strike supporters should not give up on those workers, but should constantly remind wavering workers of the real possibility of victory. Both in words and action, strike supporters should constantly remind waverers of the stakes involved in the struggle and of the real strength

BAMN

The Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration & Immigration Rights, and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary

BAMN is an integrated organization comprised primarily of young people who are learning how to be leaders of the new Civil Rights/Immigrant Rights and Labor Movements. We have stood on the understanding of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: that mass militant action is needed for poor, working class, and middle class communities to win equality, dignity and justice.

Since BAMN was founded in 1995, we have always been an activist civil rights group committed to defending and supporting the organized labor movement. Throughout its history, BAMN has maintained that black, Latina/o, and other minority communities could only build a civil rights movement that could truly win the struggle against racism if there was an alliance between a militant, independent civil rights movement and a strong, revitalized, independent, integrated, and growing organized labor movement—a true alliance of the workers and the oppressed. BAMN has also fought for the unity of the labor movement with the struggles for immigrant rights and for equal rights, opportunities, and dignity for women, youth, and for lesbians and gay men. BAMN members are currently activists fighting to build AFSCME, SEIU, the AFT, the NEA, the UAW, and other unions. Everywhere, BAMN fights for the support of immigrant and minority communities for the struggles of America's unions and for the commitment of our unions to the struggles against racism and sexism, against scapegoating and other attacks on immigrants, and against all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

We are proud to walk the picket lines with General Motors workers and the thousands of other union and community members that come out every day to show their support for this historic action.

To BAMN, this strike is the living embodiment of what BAMN is. As young people, we have spent all of our lives watching our parents and our grandparents stepped on and humiliated, lashing out against this or that imaginary enemy, ashamed of their own passivity. So, for us to see people of our parents' and our grandparents' generations standing up and fighting for our futures gives us hope and pride. It redoubles our dedication to the struggles of all the oppressed. It makes it possible for us to get other young people to believe that we can have the lives that we deserve. We have watched Donald Trump, the President who, more than any other, serves the corporate elite, using racism and anti-immigrant bigotry, fear, and prejudice to keep us divided, isolated, and fill too many of us with despair. In this strike, we see the contours of what America can be. We must defeat Donald Trump and force him to resign or be removed. It is no coincidence that the Democrats are saying they are ready to act now. This strike is shaking everything up. We must not underestimate the power we have. If we win, we will initiate a new period of American labor struggles. We must not settle for too little, too soon. Time is on our side.

involved in the unity of co-workers and their union sisters and brothers.

Dealing with a first offer/tentative agreement

At some point, GM strikers will be given a "first offer"/tentative agreement to vote on. The UAW leadership has said that the picket lines will stay up until after the ballots are counted and will come down

only if the union membership has agreed to accept a new contract. This is a completely correct way to conduct the strike vote, because it gives union members the power to go on striking and to have the right to reject one or more tentative agreements. When GM workers hear that a tentative agreement has been reached, many will feel like they can finally exhale, like their gamble paid off. But when they

see the actual agreement, their reactions and emotions may change because the first offer is likely to be far less than workers deserve and have the strength to win.

Everyone will be talking about what to do next. The answer is simple: if GM workers reject the first contract offer, they can win much more. The truth is that GM workers are in a much stronger position than GM is. Yes, continuing the strike will be financially difficult, but workers have so many unions, community organizations, and ordinary people behind them, that if they just ask for help, they will get it. GM workers and their supporters must shake free from the illusions that GM is all-powerful, and auto workers and their supporters are powerless.

GM has far more to lose than we do if the strike goes on for another few weeks. GM cannot defend being intransigent. Everyone knows they have made record profits. GM management already has stockholders, Wall Street investors, and leaders of other companies breathing down their necks to wrap up the strike now. They need to get production restarted to forestall losing more of their market share. But they cannot run their plants with scabs, and even trying to do so risks turning picket lines into pitched battlefields.

Whether GM sales recover after this strike is contingent on how they act during the strike. Twenty-four years have passed since the Detroit newspaper strike, but tens of thousands of their former readers still boycott those newspapers. GM's national and international reputation and image will be shaped by this strike. If GM management has a brain, they will want to come out of this strike looking like a company that is fair to its workers.

In contrast, GM workers stand on the moral high ground. They have the support of the vast majority of Americans, who think that GM owes workers for the sacrifices and concessions they made in the last dozen years. Auto workers are giving hope and courage to millions of other workers who have been waiting and wanting to fight but have needed someone else to open the floodgates and show the way forward.

Building an American labor movement

It is important to remember that the GM strike has been called after two years of a substantial increase in strike activity by many American unions and American workers, giving expression to a long accumulation of the just resentment of ever-growing income inequality and attacks on working conditions that have been the

reality of “globalization” and “neo-liberalism” for most workers, while the rich have gotten obscenely richer and giant corporations have become a monopoly-capitalist tyranny over the people—and most of the governments—of the world. Auto workers can now make clear that the potential power of the collective struggle unleashed, as that accumulated workers' resentment is expressed, is greater than GM, because it really does represent the needs, interests, and hopes of the great majority of people, while GM represents only a tiny minority—an elite “1%” that speaks for nobody but itself.

If the GM workers persist in their struggle, every management will want to avoid a strike by their workers. Many unionized workers will be offered better tentative agreements than their management ever thought they would offer just to avoid a strike.

This strike will be the touchstone for every trade unionist who is angry and ready to fight. To know how to strike to win, GM workers need to understand how much power they possess and how much more they can win if they reject the tentative agreement that management would like them to feel grateful for.

There have been more strikes in the last two years than took place in the decade before. The GM strike is different because this strike is more powerful than any of the others and because the GM workers are already changing the balance of power and striking a blow against the Donald Trump presidency and his racist, anti-immigrant, sexist, anti-union, pro-management, and profoundly anti-democratic actions and ideology. The auto workers and their supporters are the real standard bearers for how to make America great.

The potential power of the GM strike is far greater than the current number of striking workers. Objectively, the GM strike has the potential to open a new, far more positive period in American history—a period that will reject and, once and for all, slam the door on the last period of union submission to management, humiliating concessions, growing income inequality, contracting opportunities, and abandoned hopes. The movement in support of the GM workers, the movement of auto workers and their labor and community supporters, is a model for the independent movement that can drive the deranged white nationalists, “alt-rights,” and other neo-fascists back into the rat holes they came from, and offer real hope to counter the despair of working class youth who have seen only hopelessness

and been tempted by the lies and hate of the political demagogues—including the would-be tyrant, Trump.

This new, integrated struggle for equality, dignity and respect can go down in history as the moment that the UAW restored its proud history of leading a fighting trade union movement and fighting for civil rights, voting rights, immigrant rights, and women's rights, and against every form of bigotry that was at odds with our fight for unity and equality. This strike has given us the power to say to every downtrodden person who has lost his or her confidence of ever amounting to anything: we will happily lift you up and carry you on our shoulders until you can get back on your feet and walk with your head held high. The struggle of the GM workers can be the spark that brings the labor movement back to life, creating a revitalized labor movement, to restore this nation's unity and make our vision for a great America come alive.

The GM auto workers have been conducting a wildly popular strike that has more power to create good than most imagined possible a few weeks ago. The issue facing GM workers and their supporters is: do we move forward and believe in our right to lead, not just this struggle against one of the most powerful companies in the world, but to lead a movement to make America what we believe it should be—the land of liberty with freedom and justice for all.

Every day there are young children on the picket lines holding the hand of one of their striking parents, witnessing their parents becoming their best selves. We are teaching our children to be proud members of America's working class. We should not shy away from showing them that American workers have the power to give them the America they deserve.

2019.09.25