Auto strike spreads

‘No deal, no wheels!’

By Martha Grevatt
Center Line, Michigan

Just seven and a half days into a historic strike against Ford, General Motors and Stellantis (formerly Chrysler), on Sept. 22 at noon the union expanded its targeted strike of three plants to include all 58 parts distribution centers (PDCs) of Stellantis and GM. These warehouses, located in 20 different states, house parts that get shipped to dealerships for repairs.

The expansion raises the total number of striking Big Three members of the United Auto Workers to 18,600, up from 13,000 at the three assembly plants that began the strike Sept. 15.

Spirits were high when this writer visited picket lines at PDCs in Streetsboro, Ohio, and Center Line, Michigan. Strikers in Center Line chanted, “What do you want? End tiers. When do you want it? Now!” and “No deal, no wheels!”

The union has made 10 core “Members Demands” on the companies, centered on workers’ wages, benefits and job security and a shorter work week. Feeling the impact of the strike, Ford has conceded to a number of these demands, thus making it easier to expand the strike at Ford for now.

Workers on the line expressed strong feelings against the tiered pay and benefit structure. Tiering allows the company to give some workers lower pay and/or lesser benefits than others doing the same work based on their date of hire or if they are classified as “temporary part-time” or “supplemental.” For example, at the Big Three, production workers hired after October 2007 will not get a pension or health insurance when they retire. Temporary workers have lower pay, fewer benefits and far less protection from discipline and firings.

Labor and community support growing

Solidarity is building on many fronts. Big Three UAW members at plants not on strike are engaged in the contract struggle, organizing support rallies, joining picket lines, holding "Red Shirt Wednesday" actions in the plants and refusing voluntary overtime. Strikers from two assembly plants an hour’s drive apart, Ford’s Michigan Assembly Plant and Stellantis’ Toledo Jeep, have been supporting each other with car caravans from one plant to the other that then circle the plant of their UAW counterparts.

Beyond the UAW, many major unions have made statements backing the auto strike and have sent members to pickets and rallies. The Teamsters union has made it clear its member drivers will not cross the picket line.

Speaking about the importance of the auto strike, Association of Flight Attendants-CWA President Sara Nelson stated in a Sept. 23 interview on MSNBC, “Workers are making our demands up front, we’re very clear about what our demands are. It has gone in the wrong direction for too long … We’re going to wreck their [the billionaires’] economy.” Workers understand that, “This strike is about all of us. Labor and community supporters stop

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Historic Palestine Writes Festival triumphs over opposition

By Betsy Piette
Philadelphia

The resistance aroused by a Zionist assault on the Palestine Writes Festival this Sept. 22-24 weekend at the University of Pennsylvania turned the event from what would have already been a marked success into a defiant triumph over Zionism and repression.

Had the Zionists and their allies among the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania stayed silent, had they allowed the first ever, in-person, U.S. Palestine Writes Festival to go ahead unchallenged, attendance would have still been significant. It would have been a success. Early registration was over 800 people.

But the Zionists carried out a vitriolic attack campaign over several days. They drove a mobile billboard truck around the UPenn campus. They made calls, threatening to stop the event. They convinced a libelous attempt to connect the festival to an alleged attack on the campus Hillel organization. And they finally demanded the festival drop some key speakers — including Roger Waters, former member of the rock band Pink Floyd.

Even before the doors opened on Friday afternoon, Sept. 22, registration had surpassed 1,400 people, and continued to grow over the weekend. In response to the attacks, many individuals and organizations stepped up to defend the event, including over 30 UPenn faculty, several UPenn student groups, Jewish Voice for Peace and others. Even reporters in corporate media, including The Philadelphia Inquirer, provided positive coverage of the event.

Inside the Irvine Auditorium, everything was transformed into a pro-Palestine environment. A huge 10-by-30-feet map of historic Palestine identifying towns and villages existing before the 1948 Nakba were prominently displayed on wall surfaces throughout the building.

All of this helped make this festival an earthshaking, emotional, unified, defiant victory of resistance to Zionism — much in line with the historic resistance of the people of Palestine against over 75 years of occupation.

More coverage of this event to follow on Workers.org.
by regularly with coffee, water, firewood and snacks. Worldwide, labor federations and metalworker unions are expressing solidarity, including in Mexico, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Brazil and Venezuela. Mexican autoworkers are prepared to refuse overtime if the compa- nies try to shift work from struck plants to Mexico to break the strike.

The World Federation of Trade Unions issued a state- ment on the day the strike was expanded, saying, “The WFTU expresses its firm internationalist solidarity with workers in the USA and fully supports their just demands, especially at a time when the companies are gaining mil- lions in profits and the workers are suffering the after- math of the new capitalist crisis and inflation.” From India: “First of all, from the entire rank and file of [the All India Central Confederation of Trade Unions, affiliated with the WFTU], we extend our unwavering solidi- ty and support to the ongoing historic strike of United Auto Workers (UAW) against the ‘Big Three.’ We also congratulate the UAW and its leadership, who have suc- cessfully ushered in a new era of radical working-class move- ment in the union.” AICCTU, with about 2.5 million mem- bers, is one of 10 labor feder- ations in India.

UAW President Shawn Fain stated that the UAW supports Italian autowork- ers who have recently held intermittent strikes against Stellantis.

Biden says he will picket

Vying for labor support in the 2024 elections, a number of Democratic Party politi- cians have said they support the strike. Some have spoken at rallies or joined picket lines. President Joe Biden joined striking workers on Sept. 26, one day before former President Donald Trump was to be in Detroit to try to woo autoworkers away from support for their union. This is all happening right as UAW President Fain, in office only six months, is taking on the corporations in a big way after decades of what Fain calls “company unionism.”

While Biden said he would “stand in solidarity with the men and women of the UAW,” in the same tweet he called for “a win-win agreement.” But in the struggle between labor and capital over the wealth created by labor, there is no “win-win.” One side’s gain is the other side’s loss. The less the bosses pay the working class, the more they keep for themselves in the form of profits. Any gain for workers cuts into the bosses’ profit-taking.

Whether Biden’s appeal to the UAW or Trump’s demagogy will help autoworkers win a decent contract. It’s by weaponizing their power to withhold their labor that autoworkers can make good the slogan, “When we fight, we win.”

Martha Grevatt is a retired UAW Stellantis worker who served on the executive board of UAW Local 869.

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Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist- Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism, but to build a socialist society because it’s the only way forward!

Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the never-ending quest for ever-greater profits.

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, attacks on immigrants, misogyiny, LGBTQ+ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means homelessness, increasing homelessness and impoverishment and lack of hope for the future. No social problem can be solved under capitalism.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet no one has a guaranteed right to shelter, food, water, health care, education or anything else — unless they can pay for it. Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even get into college. Black, Brown and Indigenous youth and trans people are gassed down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

The ruthless ruling class today seeks to wipe out decades of gains and benefits won by hard-fought strugg- les by people’s movements. The super-rich and their political representatives have intensified their attacks on the multinational, middle-class and multigenerational working class. It is time to point the blame at — and challenge — the capitalist system.

WWF fights for socialism because the working class produces all wealth in society, and this wealth should remain in their hands, not be stolen in the form of capi- talist profits. The wealth workers create should be socially owned and its distribution planned to satisfy and guarantee basic human needs.

Since 1939, Workers World Party has been out in the streets defending the workers and oppressed here and worldwide. If you’re interested in Marxism, socialism and fighting for a socialist future, please contact a WW branch near you.

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Workers World 121 W. 27th St., Suite 304 New York, NY 10011 Phone: 212.627.2994 E-mail: wwp@workers.org Web: www.workers.org Vol. 65, No. 39 • September 28, 2023 Closing date: September 12, 2023 Editors: John Catalinotto, Martha Grevatt, Deirdre Griswold, Monica Moorehead, Betsey Plette Web Editors: Albeer, Harvey Markowitz, Janet Mayes Tear Down the Walls! Editors: Miranda Crissman, Ted Kelly Production & Design Editors: G. Armby, Sasha Mazumder Copyediting and Proofreading: Paddy Colligan, Steve Gillis and K. James Contributing Editors: G. Dunkel, K. Durkin, Sara Flounders, Otis Grotewohl, Gloria Rubac Mundo Obrero: Deborah Rodriguez, Carlos Vargas Copyright © 2023 Workers World. Verbatim copying and distribution of articles is permitted in any medium without royalty provided this notice is preserved. Workers World (ISSN-1070-4205) is published monthly by WW Publishers, 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404, New York, NY 10011. Phone: 212.627.2994 Subscriptions: One year: $36; institutions: $50 Letters to the editor may be condensed and edited. Articles can be freely reprinted, with credit to Workers World, 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404, New York, NY 10011. Back issues and individual articles are available on microfilm and/or photocopy from NA Publishing, Inc. PO Box 998, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-0998. A searchable archive is available on the Web at www.workers.org. A headline digest is available via e-mail subscription. Subscription information is at workers.org. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Workers World, 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404 New York, NY 10011.