

The US – Great win for autoworkers after massive strike action

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In the US, the United Auto Workers (UAW) has achieved a great result after a historic strike. Not only did the union win substantial wage increases for all members, at least 25% over four and a half years, but the new wage structure eliminates the second- and third-class statuses for temporary workers and others with precarious contracts. Some of these workers will enjoy extraordinary pay increases, up to 150%. Furthermore, the union regained the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that was done away with during the 2008 financial crisis.

This unique victory was celebrated after a 45-day industrial action against the big three Detroit automakers (General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis). This first-ever joint strike ended a long era of concession bargaining. The strike involved at the highest 45,000 union members at close to 50 production facilities.

The UAW went into the negotiations with the most audacious set of demands from a major American trade union in modern times, for example a 46% pay rise. But the automakers, which made a combined \$21 billion in profits in the first six months of 2023, first claimed, that they could not afford to meet even the most reasonable of the workers. Therefore, industrial action was inevitable, and the workers were definitely motivated for it.

The walkouts enjoyed an extraordinary level of support from the public as three out of four Americans sided with the striking workers. And even the union's boldest proposals, such as the demand for a 32-hour week, attracted significantly more support than opposition. During the conflict, President Biden himself joined the picket line. Other top politicians from Washington followed suit.

As a result of the agreement between UAW and the "big three", Toyota, Honda and Hyundai have also announced quite significant pay rises to keep their conditions attractive for workers.

Data in the US shows that the general popularity of unions is rising, that the American people believe that unions benefit both their members and workers who are not unionised, that labour organisations improve the standing of companies, and that strong unions are good for the US economy. Today, a record-high 61% says unions help rather than hurt the economy. This is the reality despite numerous media outlets and politicians trying to tell us that unions are relics of the past. This support will be crucial for the next trade unions fights in the US such as securing universal access to health care, stopping retirement insecurity and improving conditions in companies and regions where unions did not manage yet to transform record profit for companies into record contracts for workers.

Edited by industriAll Europe.