UAW RANK AND FILE MUST SUPPORT LOCAL 2192 STRIKERS AND FIGHT THE ASSAULT ON SOCIAL SERVICES!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

The strike by Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services workers in Ohio is a warning and a call to action for the entire working class. These workers are fighting not only for themselves, but for every family that depends on basic social services—and for every worker being told to accept poverty wages while billionaires and corporations grow richer.

More than 140 caseworkers, investigators and social service workers—members of UAW Local 2192—walked out February 18 after working for months without a contract. They administer essential benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid, childcare assistance, Ohio Works First and Adult Protective Services.

Workers describe an unbearable combination of low pay, high stress, chronic understaffing and constant turnover, as new hires quit once they confront the workload for wages as low as $15 to $18 an hour. Even experienced workers report wages that barely reach the low $20s an hour—hardly enough to support a family, much less sustain a skilled workforce delivering critical services.

The strikers also explain something the politicians and union officials won't say: attacks on workers and attacks on the public are two sides of the same class policy. Budget cuts to social programs intensify the caseloads, raise the pressure on staff, and force workers to tell desperate people that benefits are being cut off—sometimes overnight. In his State of the Union address, Trump bragged that 2.4 million people have been kicked off food stamps, as though driving families deeper into hunger were an achievement.

The conditions described by JFS workers—burnout, understaffing, unaffordable healthcare, and wages that don't keep up with the cost of living—are the daily reality for workers everywhere. This is inequality in practice: an oligarchy that hoards unimaginable wealth and funnels trillions into war, while the working class is told there is "no money" for healthcare, food assistance or a living wage.

These attacks are compounded across the entire Cleveland area, which has suffered decades of deindustrialization—plant closures, mass layoffs and the destruction of communities—carried out with the collusion of the UAW and the USW. While the corporations stripped the region for profit, the union apparatus policed the workforce, imposed concessions, and helped enforce the shutdowns that devastated the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands. Now the same ruling class claims there is "no money" for social services, even as it bails out Wall Street and expands war.

The UAW bureaucracy is isolating the strike and refusing to call for unified action by Jobs and Family Services workers across Ohio, including those organized by AFSCME, OCSEA and other unions. Most members of the UAW don't even know that the strike is happening. They won't mobilize broader support because they fear a movement of the working class that escapes their control.

I am running for UAW president to abolish the apparatus and transfer power to rank-and-file workers so we can organize a genuine, unified struggle throughout the working class in defense of our social rights.

JFS workers are also confronting the cruelty of the attacks on immigrant workers and their families. Workers described having to tell callers that their health insurance was being terminated overnight, as Trump and the ruling class scapegoat immigrants while slashing social programs for everyone, forcing workers to administer policies they oppose.

At the same time, there are growing signs of broader opposition that can—and must—be mobilized to break the isolation of this strike. In nearby Elyria, another suburb of Cleveland, hundreds of high school students walked out this week to protest ICE raids and sweeping cuts to public education, including a $9 million budget shortfall and the threatened elimination of 45 teachers. This demonstrates the potential for uniting JFS workers with students, educators, parents and workers across the region in a common fight for the rights of all workers.

Workers need rank-and-file committees—independent organizations controlled by workers themselves—to link up across workplaces and industries, uniting workers in different unions and those not in unions, to fight for living wages and full healthcare for all, defend immigrants against scapegoating, and oppose the bipartisan assault on social programs. The resources exist. What's required is a united counteroffensive against inequality and the oligarchy that rules over society.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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