

GM worker dies after being struck by vehicle near picket line at Spring Hill, Tennessee

By Jessica Goldstein
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On Thursday, October 24 at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online strike update call. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

A striking General Motors worker was killed near the picket line at GM's Spring Hill Manufacturing Plant at 6:15 AM Tuesday. Roy A. McCombs was crossing the road to the picket on the bridge that leads from Highway 31 to the plant's south entrance when he was struck by a Chevrolet Equinox, according to witness reports. Mr. McCombs succumbed to injuries and apparently died shortly thereafter. It is unclear what, if any, emergency aid was called for or given at the time of the crash.

Hundreds of workers have voiced their condolences and support for the McCombs family and for the striking GM workers on social media.

Some press reports allege that the driver who struck and killed McCombs was apparently driving to a daycare facility located on the plant's property. It is not clear whether or not the driver could see Mr. McCombs near the road. Lt. Jeremy Haywood of the Columbia, Tennessee Police Department declined to comment to the press about the driver's statement, and said that the investigation into the incident is not complete.

A striking worker who spoke to the press stated that the picket was moved to the bridge that day because the gate where they were supposed to picket was too far off the highway, and difficult for motorists to see from the road. It is unclear whether all striking workers had access to proper safety equipment to make themselves more visible to motorists at higher speeds in the dark.

Roy McCombs' death is the second reported death on the picket lines since the strike began September 15. Fifty-one-year-old Jennifer Taylor McDowell died of a

heart attack on the picket line at GM Fort Wayne Assembly Plant in Roanoke, Indiana on October 5.

GM has tried to intimidate workers at the Spring Hill Plant into submission by filing a court injunction against pickets at the plant, which expired October 8. Workers were also arrested at Spring Hill for blocking strikebreaker trucks which attempted to cross the picket lines.

Other workers have been intimidated by scabs who have hit workers with vehicles on the picket lines at Swartz Creek near Flint, Michigan, and by police who parked their vehicles near pickets at Warren Tech Center near Detroit. Workers at pickets in Parma, Ohio reported multiple shots fired in their direction from a passing vehicle in the early morning hours on September 24. In all of these cases, the United Autoworkers (UAW) has not stepped in to defend the workers in any meaningful way.

Throughout the entire strike, the UAW has isolated the workers at GM, leaving them at the mercy of the corporation, the police and courts who protect the interests of the capitalist ruling class. The UAW refused to mobilize strike action by workers at Fiat-Chrysler (FCA) and Ford, who are working under an extended contract and voted to strike by an average of 95% before the contract expired on September 1.

The UAW has also isolated workers from their international brothers and sisters in Oshawa, Canada, who also face a plant closure, and in Silao, Mexico, where workers have been fired for forming their own committees to protest the production speedup demanded by the company, in solidarity with striking GM workers in the US.

The tragic death of Roy McCombs, who joined his brothers and sisters in a fight to defeat GM's attacks on their living standards, came one day after 51 percent of

production workers at the plant—1,527 of a total of 3,013—voted down the tentative agreement between the UAW and GM reached on October 21.

The miserable sellout contract that was rejected included, among other measures, wage increases that did not keep pace with inflation, a signing bonus that would not account for lost wages during the strike, a blank check for the unlimited use of temps to replace laid-off senior workers, the closure of three GM plants in the US, and a so-called “pathway” to full employment for temporary workers which was littered with loopholes and incentives for higher-paid workers to quit.

UAW President Gary Jones and Vice President Terry Dittes issued a joint statement after McCombs’ death: “On behalf of the UAW, we offer condolences to Brother McCombs and family, friends and co-workers. Today’s accident is heartbreaking for UAW Spring Hill members. We will continue to work to ensure that safety is a priority on the picket line.”

GM also issued perfunctory statements of sympathy for McCombs and his family.

Their statements are filled with hypocrisy. Jones and Dittes are the same UAW negotiators who drew up the sellout contract with the corporation that the workers have courageously rejected. They have gone back on every promise they have made to the workers in the course of the struggle, including the guaranteed pathway to full-time labor for temp workers and the demand that all plants slated for closure would remain open.

Workers have spoken out against the planned closure of the Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant, which will devastate workers and their families and the wider community. Already there have been reports of suicides at Lordstown after the definite closure was announced. Dittes and Jones are attempting to push through a contract that will take many more lives by starving workers into submission with \$275 per week in strike pay from a strike fund of \$800 million.

If their struggle is left in the hands of the corrupt, pro-company UAW, they will see another repeat of the fraudulent 2015 contract votes in which UAW officials engaged in intimidation of workers, suppressed their democratic rights to free speech and allegedly stuffed ballots in order to arrive at a miraculous 51 percent “yes” vote needed to pass the sellout deal.

The “no” vote at Spring Hill is an expression of the immense anger toward the conditions imposed on the working class by the capitalist profit system and the unions which act as a police force standing between the workers and the corporations.

It is part of a wider struggle that encompasses large sections of workers worldwide. We urge autoworkers to draw up their own demands, independently of the UAW, including full oversight of the contract voting process by the rank-and-file themselves.

In order for their struggle to continue and succeed, workers must form rank-and-file committees to break out of the isolation imposed by the unions and reach out to other workers at FCA and Ford for support; to Mack-Volvo truck builders and Asarco mineworkers on strike; to over 30,000 educators in Chicago on strike; as well as workers across the border, and other critical sections of workers who are engaging in bitter struggles, to begin to take the steps toward a powerful general strike against the capitalist system across North America.

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<http://www.wsws.org>