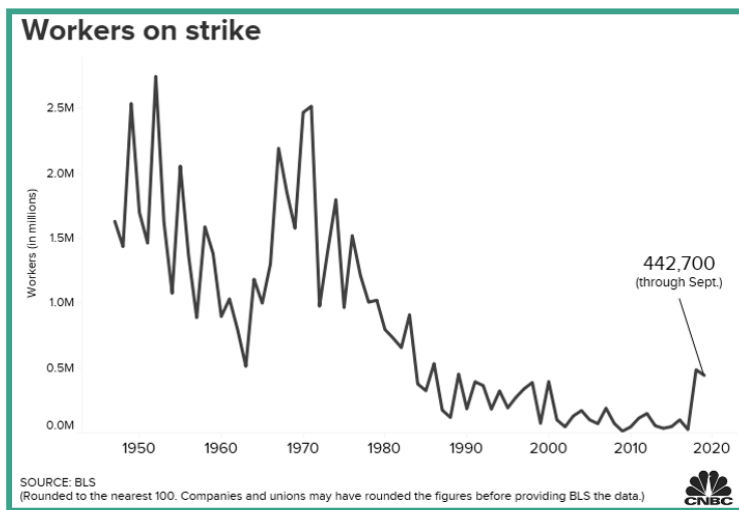




2019 General Motors Strike: *An Analysis of Strikers' Attitudes*

The 2019 national negotiations between General Motors and the UAW will be remembered for the 40-day work stoppage. The strike was called by the UAW and began on 11:59 pm on Sunday, September 15 and ended when the contract was ratified on October 25. It was the first strike during national negotiations since the two-day walk-out in 2007 and the longest UAW strike against GM since 1998.

To put the GM strike in context, the graph below shows how the number of workers on strike has been declining since 1980 and dropped significantly at the beginning of the 21st century. Numerous strikes failed in the 1980s and 1990s when employers were able to replace the strikers and continued to provide their goods and services to consumers. Unions began to see strikes as not worth the risk until recently.



School teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona as well as workers in the health care and social assistance industries led a new wave of strikes. Since 2018, with the labor market tight and wages stagnant, workers have felt confident that going on strike could improve wages and benefits.

As the UAW strike against GM progressed, two Michigan State University professors from the School of Human Resources and Labor Relations, Maite Tapia and Christian Ibsen, proposed conducting a survey of striking GM workers at two locals in Lansing, Michigan. The leaders of UAW Locals 602 and 652 agreed to support the professors' proposal.

The purpose of the survey was to understand the workers' attitudes towards the strike, the support they received, as well as the strength of worker-union relationships.

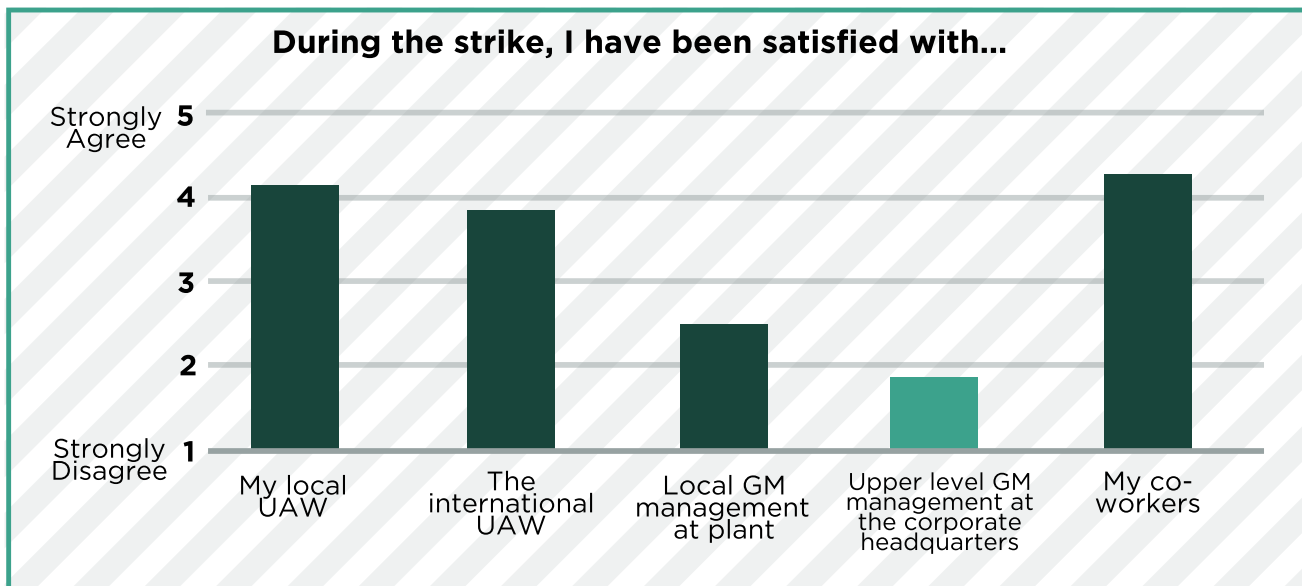


The survey was administered at the local union halls on Tuesday, October 15 through Thursday, October 17. Member response to the survey was very positive and 758 members filled out a survey at UAW Local 602 and 789 members completed surveys at UAW Local 652.

Results

Workers strongly agreed with the statement that “UAW made the right call to go on strike.” They also agreed that “the strike is good to get results” and “the strike is good for solidarity among GM workers.” These results were true across job categories and different job tiers. The workers strongly agreed to continue to strike because of wages, health care, and the conditions of temporary workers. The survey also asked about negative reasons to continue the strike such as pressure from co-workers, pressure from the union, not disappointing others and having no choice but to continue. Workers disagreed that the negative reasons were why they continued to be on strike.

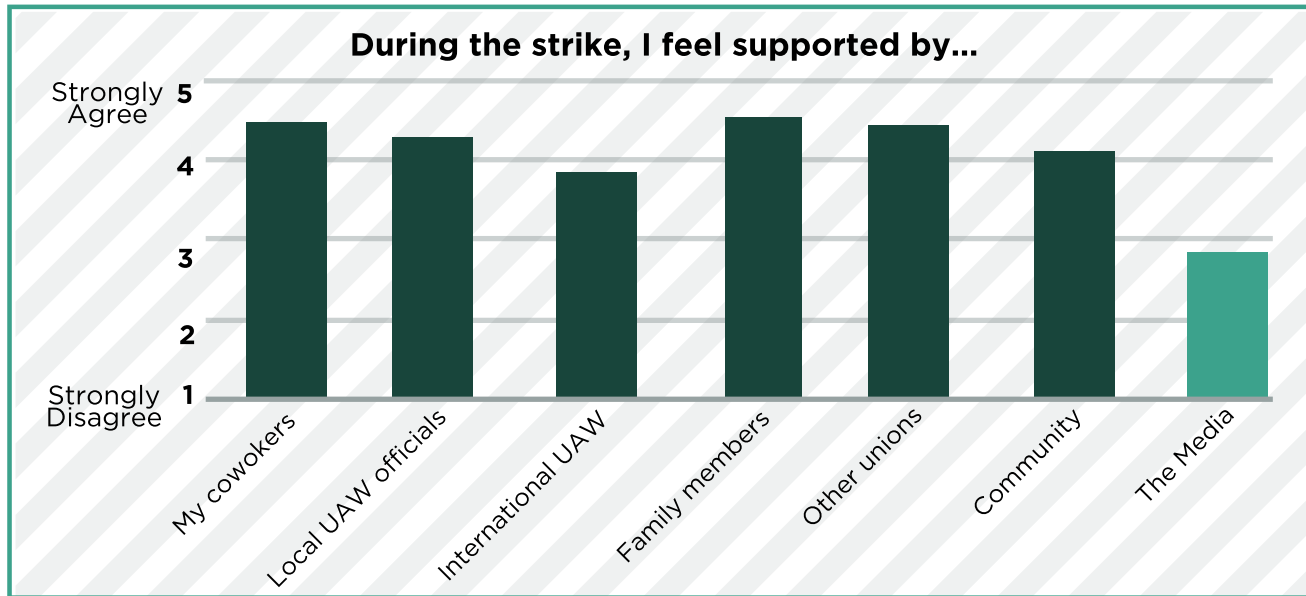
There appeared to be a strong sense of solidarity among the workers. This solidarity was apparent to anyone visiting the picket lines. Many traditional workers expressed support for temporary workers and how they thought that the temporary workers deserved better treatment under the National Agreement. As seen in the chart below, when asked, “during the strike, I have been satisfied with,” the highest response was with my co-workers and the lowest was with upper level GM management at corporate headquarters.



Source: 2019 UAW-GM survey. Number of respondents: 1,534



You can see from the graph below that the workers felt strongly supported by the union, their family, and the community while they were on strike, but less supported by the media:



Source: 2019 UAW-GM survey. Number of respondents: 1,430

When asked about the level of financial hardship that workers encountered during the strike, most workers did not experience significant difficulty. Temporary workers who are the lowest paid were the most likely to experience financial hardship and/or seek additional employment.

Conclusion

The UAW strike against GM fits into the recent trend of increase use of strikes by unionized workers. There was strong support for the local union, the decision to go on strike and solidarity towards co-workers. All the elements that negotiators need to effectively leverage a work stoppage were present.

These are the initial results from the data gathered during the strike. There are many ways to analyze the data that will be done in the future. Also, the researchers are planning to gather additional data to measure attitudes now that workers have had time to reflect on their experience.

We would like to thank all those who filled out surveys and shared their thoughts and feelings about this historic strike. We would also like to thank the leadership of UAW Local 602 and 652 for their support. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.



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