

Dayton GM workers critical of UAW leaders

Jim Lawrence
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An element of the current GM strike in Flint which the mainstream media has all but ignored is the anger and frustration felt by tens of thousands of auto workers towards the United Auto Workers leadership. For nearly two decades the UAW officialdom has openly espoused a pro-company policy, urging the rank and file to accept wage and benefit concessions, the erosion of working conditions and the elimination of jobs, in the name of making the Big Three car companies—GM, Ford and Chrysler—more competitive against their Japanese and European rivals.

After the destruction of some 141,000 jobs at Chrysler and Ford, and another 297,000 at GM, auto workers today confront the consequences of the UAW's failed policies.

The ongoing strike at two GM plants in Flint has been compared to the March 1996 strike at two GM brake plants in Dayton, Ohio, when 3,000 UAW Local 696 workers struck for 17 days. The UAW called off the strike at the Delphi Chassis brake plants just as it began crippling the company's North American operations. UAW officials declared the strike a victory for job security. However, the agreement they signed did nothing to slow down the outsourcing of jobs. A year later the company announced the closure of one of the two plants, with the loss of 600 or more jobs.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Dayton GM workers about their experiences. Cheryl, Cassidy and Randy, all 40, hired into GM in the 1970s. So did Rick, 37. Willie, Robert and James are approaching retirement age, having begun work for GM in the 1960s. Bill, 24, and Gregg, 25, hired into the Delphi Chassis brake plant from a GM air bag plant in Ohio after the 1996 strike.

WSWS: What is your assessment of the Flint strikes?

Cheryl: The same as our 1996 strike, and it will produce the same outcome. The UAW can't even fight a grievance. They told me they could not do a thing

even though I was sexually harassed and discriminated against in front of witnesses.

Bill: The union will cut a deal like they did at the air bag plant where I worked before I came to this brake plant. [The United Steel Workers of America recently reopened their contract with GM at an air bag plant in Vandalia, Ohio. The union agreed to a 10-year agreement that lowers wages for new-hires, even though workers are already only paid \$7 an hour.]

Cassidy: They told us we won in 1996 and look where we are now. The UAW says that the current strike will last until August, but after Caterpillar, who knows? GM may not let the union surrender so soon. GM is trying to increase the rate of profit any way they can. For the company, China is now a "democracy" because it can exploit workers there with the help of a so-called "communist" government.

WSWS: What are the conditions in the Dayton brake plants?

Rick: GM wants to cut jobs here in Dayton from 3,400 to 1,500. My 15 years won't keep me working here. In 1978 the pay rate was higher than some younger auto workers are making now. I don't think the UAW is doing anything. Why would you take two plants out knowing a two-week shutdown is going to take place? I have a nine-year-old daughter and a son that is twelve. How do you plan for the future? Even if you do make \$20 per hour, you have to work 60 hours a week to save a little bit. With wages so low for young people, what chance do my children or any working people's children have? We have to do something else. This isn't working.

Randy: I support the idea of fighting for jobs. However, I can say a UAW settlement won't be good if it is like it was here. Since our strike there has been more outsourcing. I guess for GM it's pay-back time and they want to get rid of us.

Greg: I have friends who make just above minimum

wage here in Dayton. You can't live on it. Something has to be done. I support the strikes in Flint. The company says run 200 more parts, and you do it. Then they say run 1,000 more parts, you do it. They still close the plant.

Robert: We had 300 workers from our union local go to the rally in Flint. It was worthwhile. I used vacation time to get off work because I wanted to join in the fight against job cuts. For the first time I understood the need for the unity of the working class. Young workers were there—white-collar, union and nonunion. The workers in Flint were low in the pocket, but high in spirits. I intended to stay one hour, but I stayed five instead because, for once, I didn't feel alone. We were all in the same boat.

WSWS: Did the UAW leaders' attack against GM for its so-called "America-last" strategy breed any anti-Mexican feelings among the workers in Flint?

Robert: Yes, there was some. In fact, they said they want to try the CEOs and government officials for treason for sending jobs to Mexico. But I believe these feelings are not because workers in Flint are opposed to Mexican workers. They are just opposed to losing their jobs.

The truth is the CEOs are treating workers all over the world the same way. I support the fight the Socialist Equality Party is waging for the international unity of workers and an independent party of workers to push for our needs. The time for that is now. I hope Flint will be a match that will light a fire.

James: The strike is about the UAW officials keeping the dues coming in and maintaining the union. They want to defend the chosen ones' jobs that don't require them to work. It is not about defending jobs. Look at the record of the UAW; they help GM get rid of jobs and people.



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