

Letters from strikers and other readers:

The GM strike, globalization and the UAW

16 July 1998

Workers around the world can send in their comments and questions, and share their own experiences and problems with their fellow workers, via the World Socialist Web Site.

E-mail correspondence should be sent to: editor@wsws.org

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See Also:

Workers give their views on the US General Motors strike
[WSWS Full Coverage]

Letter to GM strikers from an Australian car worker

'The unions use nationalism to divide the workers'

[22 July 1998]

Overwhelming vote for strike at Saturn

Auto workers turn away from GM-UAW collaboration

[21 July 1998]

GM throws down the gauntlet to auto workers

[14 July 1998]

I am a General Motors employee for the Janesville, truck and bus group. I believe that we all should stick together. I believe we should save US jobs and help with the company's growth. When the time comes for our plant to go out on strike for whatever reason, I would like to know that employees in other plants support us. We are all in this together. Fact is that General Motors knows how to solve these issues. If they do so, every one will be well-off and the company will resume production. I support Flint in every way and I wish them lots of hope in winning this strike. That is my opinion.

MS

GM worker

9 July 1998

I trust the National Union to do what is best for the American People. If GM is not stopped then they will send all the work to other countries and say to hell with the American people but expect us to buy the damn cars that foreign countries make. I say strike and cripple them and show them that America is still Strong and will not tolerate this kind of treatment.

KS

12 July 1998

Dear KS,

We thank you for your letter to the WSWs but must disagree with your comments on the strike at GM. We fail to see how the industrial and political solidarity required by the working class today can be established on the basis of the American nationalism expressed in your message. No doubt you are a militant defender of the union in the US, but it seems that you have not stopped to consider the position of workers in other countries. How should workers in Korea, Canada or Mexico take your letter? Why should they support the GM strikers?

The globalization of the auto industry has shown that the workers are

presently handicapped by the fact that they lack an international industrial and political strategy to defend jobs and improve working and living conditions. Here a crucial question must be asked: How are workers in any country to take a step forward if they allow themselves to be pitted against workers in other countries in the never-ending drive of the corporations to lower labor costs? The only program that can meet the needs of workers in this age of global capital is summed up in the slogan: 'Workers of the world, unite!'

Yours sincerely,

WSWS Editorial Board

14 July 1998

Get these strikes over with. You are destroying my life. I do not feel sorry for the UAW, they are overpaid and under-worked. It's pitiful. Stop thinking only about yourselves and think of the other people that depend on GM and are not union to make a living. We are all human beings even if we are not members of the UAW.

Signed,

KL

Alma, MI

12 July 1998

Dear KL,

We must differ with what you have to say about the strike. First of all, the WSWs has maintained that the auto shutdown involves the fate of all working people, not only in the US but around the world. It is a conflict between the profit imperatives of GM, directly representing the interests of its major stockholders and indirectly speaking for the entire capitalist class, and the needs of the GM workers for secure jobs. Should this strike be defeated as others have been over the past two decades and further work concessions granted, a step back will be taken everywhere by the working class, of which you yourself are likely a part. As the levels of productivity are heightened and the conditions of employment are worsened at GM, these will become benchmarks for other automakers and, indirectly, for entirely different industries. After all, from the standpoint of big business, one section of workers will always be 'overpaid and underworked' with respect to those employed under more exploitative conditions. For the working class to accept or endorse this argument, however, is to condemn itself to unending social retrogression.

I think that you'll see from a number of the comments of auto workers on this site that the GM strikers are motivated by many sentiments, but least of all selfishness. Many of the workers that we've met at the struck plants are relatively older and not far from retirement. But they are concerned about the fate of future generations and the communities in which they live.

Finally, we should just make clear to you that our site does not speak for or endorse the policies of the UAW. Precisely because we defend the interests of the rank-and-file workers, we have issued sharp warnings about the dangers posed by the policies of the UAW bureaucracy, particularly its defense of the profit interests of GM, its nationalism, and

its alliance with the Democratic Party.

Yours sincerely,
WSWS Editorial Board
14 July 1998

With thousands of striking GM workers and 40,000 angry construction workers in NY, it seems like a good opportunity for all ALL workers to combine forces and have a massive demonstration in support of workers' rights, and civil rights and liberty in general. It would be a great time for a few million of us serfs to convene in Detroit, or NY, or DC ...

JH
West Coast, US
11 July 1998

When is it going to stop????? My husband has 30 years in with GM and my father had 19 years. My dad saw his retirement and because of the union and their local argument with GM my husband might not see his retirement. I really think the strikers have some nerve to cause the whole country to spiral downward just when things were looking up in the U.S. What do they think GM will do now? I would put a solid opinion on GM telling all the U.S. workers where to go in no uncertain terms. That would put thousands out on the street in a blink of an eye. Where is our President through this. I realize he has big trouble of his own, but this isn't going to help this country unless he steps in and demands they settle this strike immediately. I feel terribly sorry for the people that have lost everything because of floods, fire, tornadoes and the fury of mother nature, but think of the loss of about 180,000 family homes and dreams. We can't pay mortgages, utilities, car payments, etc. on what McDonalds and Burger King pays. I realize the fight for the job security is extremely important but the striking of the company seems like the Jurassic era compared to today's high tech society. Back fifty years ago the union was strong and now it doesn't have the roar it once had. So where does it leave all of us? I just hope it's not out in the street. I pray for every person whether they work for GM or have just been an individual that has hit the fall out from this strike.

Thanks for letting me get this off my chest.
Pray for Settlement.
BE

11 July 1998

Dear BE:

Thanks for writing to the *World Socialist Web Site*. We hope that you'll continue to follow the discussion of the GM strike.

As for your letter, it's a rather contradictory one. Allow us to say that while you are justifiably angry about the difficult situation that confronts autoworkers and their families, your blame on those workers who have decided to take a stand for their jobs and conditions is misplaced.

That the workers find their jobs and futures in such peril is itself a result of social policies that have been carried out for two decades by big business and its political representatives, the Democrats and the Republicans. The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a continued attack on the living standard of the working population. The massive waves of downsizing have had a profound impact on large sections of the working class and middle class who, in general, have found new work only at lower pay and with far less security than their previous jobs offered. Over the past two decades, vast cuts have been made in social programs for health care, housing and unemployment while taxes have been sharply reduced for the wealthy. The result has been a dramatic increase in social inequality and far greater hardship for workers.

Certainly, the officials of the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions deserve no small degree of blame for the results of this process. Nominally representing more than 10 million workers in basic industry they certainly had an opportunity to organize resistance to the policies of big business. But the point is that they did not. The WSWS criticizes these organizations

for failing to defend the workers' basic interests. Stories of uncompromising defiance of corporate America by the unions during this period are, frankly, fictitious. During the 1980s and '90s union officials have joined corporate boards, betrayed strike after strike and doggedly promoted the Democratic Party.

A new strategy is definitely needed. GM is clearly taking a hard line in order to take measures to guarantee its profits. As for the Clinton administration, it supports the changes being implemented by GM. The UAW has proven unable to offer any real resistance or alternative strategy, precisely because it endorses the profit system. This is precisely the conception that must be rejected.

Yours sincerely,
WSWS Editorial Board
14 July 1998

This format of informal discussions between the WSWS and striking workers is great! There needs to be more of this inside look into the social and political problems that particular workers and world labor are grappling with.

These interviews give readers a more concrete picture of the dynamic state of consciousness of workers who are being impelled by their struggle, and the SEP's intervention, to question the old trade union reformist and nationalist ways of thinking, and move toward an international socialist solution.

I agree that the profit system and nation states are not biologically natural or eternal, but transitory obsolete, historical products which now restrict and choke off the life of the most creative and productive forces, nature and human labor.

Regards,
11 July 1998

I don't think that Wall Street has any business telling GM or any other company how to run a business. They should keep busy by pinching their own pennies and let business proceed at their own pace. No one on Wall street can say that GM has not and is not making money, but how much money will make these sharks of the money world happy? It seems to me that the older folks up there have turned into money collectors and the young ones are afflicted with what I call 'THE NEW COLLEGE EDUCATION' where they have partied through school, learned that if they can talk louder than anyone else their ideas, as silly as they may be, will be heard. What they lack is patriotism and the good common sense that an alley cat has. Look around folks, the world that you are ruining is ours as well as yours!

CAD
11 July 1998
Dear Editor,

I would love to have a \$23 per hour job. I studied mathematics at an Ivy League university, speak three languages, and am employed as a computer programmer. My job often requires me to work 80 hours per week without overtime or compensation beyond a negligible meal allowance. Yet I make far less than most GM factory workers.

In such a light, it appears that the UAW workers are vastly overpaid for their skills. The fact that Mexican workers are willing (and able) to work for one tenth of the UAW workers' salaries is evidence of this.

So long as autos remain a commodity product, and auto industry a globalized one, the UAW workers cannot expect to sustain the extreme wage disparity between themselves and the rest of the developing world, without being commensurately more productive. ! Yet by clinging to outmoded work rules, the UAW prevents this, and will ultimately reap (50,000 job losses) what it has sown.

Rather than vainly try to 'protect' dull, deadening, and dangerous jobs in a technically obsolete assembly plant, the UAW should realize that though the number of factory workers will decline through automation and computerization, these industries will create higher paying, more

interesting, and safer positions in the secondary industries, and should attempt to prepare its members for such day.

GB

10 July 1998

GB,

Notwithstanding your mastery of mathematics, fluency in three languages and computer programming skills, your arrogant letter shows no understanding of social realities. You say essentially the following: Insofar as multinational corporations can exploit labor for next to nothing in many parts of the world, workers in the more advanced countries should accept the inevitable job cuts and leveling down of wages that accompany globalization under capitalism.

Apparently you've never stopped to consider that your argument might just as easily be applied to computer programming as to auto assembly. In India one finds programmers with equal skill and mathematical ability working for less than one-tenth the wages of their American counterparts.

Yours sincerely,

WSWS Editorial Board

14 July 1998

I am a GM worker and I would like to ask for some one to find out how many of our cars from the USA are exported to other countries...???? I might be wrong but it would be interesting to find out many of their cars come in and ours out.... I know that we are supposed to be global but I think that we are headed the same way the steel mills and other jobs have taken. They're not here anymore.... How many Fords, Chevy's, Olds, Pontiacs, etc. are sold in Germany, Mexico, etc. that were made in the United States and EXPORTED there...????... I know I've said it twice but I watch the world news and different shows on various countries and I haven't seen anything that looks like what we make here.... All I can say is that if I lose my job by all the rearrangements going on and the cutbacks I doubt if I can buy another new truck or car.... I just hope that I can get a job on the electric company, phone co., gas co., or one of the major services you really need so no one will tell us, the auto workers, that we get paid too much, I've heard that time and time again. Come on in a parts plant and sweat a little....

RB

8 Jul 1998

Dear RB,

While recent figures indicate that the US is a net importer of automobiles, these statistics are losing much of their meaning. As we've pointed out on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the auto industry is increasingly global in character, with cars assembled across national boundaries. The 'nationality' of a vehicle is a concept that is increasingly outmoded.

The real question raised by your letter is the following: What policies and outlook does the working class need to adopt in order to stop all job losses and concessions *in every country*?

WSWS Editorial Board

14 July 1998

As a former Political Science major now working as an administrative support employer, I can hardly close my eyes and quiet my sighs at the world in front of me today. So I wanted to voice my views and support for the striking auto workers. The pendulum is swinging back in favor of the worker and pulling at the purse strings of the Corporate CEOs. As a worker in Corporate America, it scares me that so few stand up for their beliefs for fear of reprisal. Unity is the only solution. Working for a corporation that voted out a union, I honestly do have mixed views, but know for certain, that RECORD corporate profits and continual downsizing and a younger and cheaper workforce in America reduce the chances of me staying afloat after I turn 50 years old.

The pseudo-TV-worker personality prototype is killing those of us that live in reality. Single mothers, deadbeat parents, higher costs of everything and of course you know we must have everything. Ugh! Where does it all end?

The exploitation of the third-world countries' labor force and the declining cost of labor to produce more, that is of a lesser quality, can only mean trouble for those that seek to hold onto their jobs in the so-called developed worlds. Furthermore, with the world population dramatically increasing, is there enough and for who? Our democracy is not a voice for the people any longer, but for the corporate puppets who manipulate the legislation. I smell trouble in the air for the future of America. Look at our violent youth... SOS. Guess I can struggle and stand up for justice and peace and achieve a state of a peaceful wreck.

Wide Awake in America

LP

1 July 1998

Being new to the web, I was very surprised to find this site. I am a factory worker who is on lay-off because of these strikes, and I am employed by GM. I was very surprised to find in the interviews with two of our Australian counterparts (fellow auto employees) that we here in the US are considered competitors.

Perhaps I am naive, but I had never thought of the people in other nations, in the blue collar workforce, as competitors. I guess that perhaps this comes from the differences in the ways that different people express themselves. I have always felt that the very fact that we are employed in the auto industry and face the same problems in the workplace makes us brothers and sisters with the same cause, not only to do our respective jobs to the best of our abilities, but also to keep our workplaces the safest that we can for all concerned.

I was pleased to see that they recognize that our fate is intertwined with theirs. We here are fighting to have GM keep their word that has been negotiated and is in a signed contract. If we allow them to break their word and continue to do as they like at a local level, then the contracts that they have signed nationally will be no good either. Time after time they have given their word at various individual plants in many locations, only to break it when they feel that it is to their advantage.

I work for a plant that GM had promised not to sell or close before 1999. In December of 1997, they passed out a paper that said that they were going ahead and putting the plant on the sale block. Then they sold the plant. The new owners were supposed to close the sale by the end of June. So far they haven't closed the sale, but this is what we are fighting over. We opened the local agreement talks early, because GM asked us to, and gave them what they wanted as far as things that they said needed to be changed. They then turned around and broke the promises that they made in return for the changes that we agreed to.

Do not take me wrong, I agree that there are practices in the workplace that need to be changed. But in the case of my plant the changes were made and then GM did what it wanted to do anyway. If we allow it to continue here, it will not be long before it is being done everywhere else. I can see where it is being done to the workers in Australia and that the union hasn't been successful in stopping it. I have no answers, because from what I read and understood, perhaps the unions operate differently in other nations. I cannot say much from the standpoint of those unions, because I have no understanding of the way things work in other countries. I do not mean to offend anyone because of my misunderstanding. It would be nice to be able to talk to other people in the auto industry and see what they feel and how things are being done in their situations.

Fraternally yours,

SC

United States

30 June 1998

I just read your article titled, 'GM's hard line staggers United Auto Workers officials.' I don't have time to give a detailed response to it, but I want to thank you for publishing it.

Traditional media outlets report the facts of events, but they inevitably (and deliberately) neglect the reasons for the events, the greater context that gives meaning to the events. Your article is illuminating for filling in what CNN leaves out.

Thanks again, and keep up the great writing.

AD

30 June 1998

As long as the GM has all the power to control its workers and the labor unions give in workers will have an uphill battle for their jobs.

RR UFCW/Organizer/Rep.

27 June 1998

I happen to be an American citizen living in Georgia. I have absolutely nothing to do with the auto industry with the exception of purchasing one from time to time. I was, however, infuriated by the evening world news tonight seeing all the auto industry going to Mexico and China. I am also a Vietnam veteran and I fought for this country and to see it being handed over to foreign countries is just appalling. I am curious as to why the UAW doesn't launch a major campaign to all Americans with any patriotism left in them at all to completely boycott General Motors!

Sincerely,

DJS

22 June 1998

I can understand that UAW wants to keep their jobs here. I hope that they do. What I don't understand is all these UAW workers complaining they don't make enough money. Most GM workers earn more than three people put together. I work for a rubber factory that makes all the car mats for the Big Three. Plus they make mats for every other car maker there is. GM workers complain about \$25 an hour. Well come to my work and try working for \$8.35 an hour and see how they like that. I still can make a good living. So I hope they can keep there jobs here but quit complaining about the money they make. I would do anything I could to work for you guys.

USWA Local 50 member

19 June 1998

I'm writing because we have to do something about what is going on with the UAW. I think they are striking for a good reason. Plus I remember back in 1994 when they were going to help us with our strike fund. Now we all should stand up and help them out. They are striking because enough jobs are going over the border. Plus these companies are starting nonunion companies. We have to stand up for our future and our children's future or we will all lose. Plus we have to stand up to the Government. They are trying to get their hands in our pensions and we can't let it happen. I'm tired and I'm sure a lot of other people are tired of the government not paying attention to the people in the United States. We should come first. Think of all the people that are in the unions. We should strike the nation and stand up for our rights. If we don't it will be to late. So let's unite and stand and fight.

Thank you,

MM

16 June 1998

See Also:

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