

Auto workers around the world speak on General Motors strike in America

"US strike is a warning of what will happen here"

Worker at GM in Australia

7 July 1998

Over the past week the distribution of a WSWS statement on the General Motors strikes in the US has met with considerable interest at the GM plant at Fisherman's Bend, Australia. At the end of the day shift last Tuesday workers lined up to take a leaflet on the walkouts as well as a flier on the Chrysler-Daimler merger.

CM has worked at the GM plant for 18 months and spoke to the WSWS about the significance of the dispute in the US.

'When I was first told about the US strikes, I was concerned I hadn't been told anything about it via the media. You'd think our own union would have known something about it, or would have bothered to inform us. It just shows how much the unions are in the pockets of the management. What happens in the States is a forewarning of what will take place here.

I think the problem is to do with globalisation -- it's not working the way we thought. A bit of trouble somewhere impacts everywhere else.

'This latest trouble in the States reminds me of the troubles they were having in Flint as shown in the film *Roger and Me*, which dealt with the impact of job losses in the car industry. It seems to me that none of the problems have been resolved.

I only started working at Fisherman's Bend in February last year, and by about July last year our hours began to be reduced like weekend work and overtime.

'The Asian crisis is causing a lot of job uncertainty around the place. Our export engines section for

Daewoo [in South Korea] has been wound down heavily. I think this is because the value of the [Korean] won has dropped significantly.

'You hear about people leaving the plant every week. I'm not sure, but they may be voluntary departures. People are really concerned about income security, even more than job security because there are less hours available for the week. Some family people may now be forced into working four-day weeks, which will mean their income will be reduced further. In many cases, they will be better off on social security.

'I'm sure that what's now happening at the US operations is a precursor for what will happen here. I just find it incredible that there has been no coverage because there are huge implications for us. It seems that there is a major push to go to countries for cheaper labor and tax concessions.

'As far as I understand, the labour costs are evening out internationally. It's scary to think that workers in the poorer countries can be sacked on the spot if they don't accept the cheap conditions. In our plant the management is always increasing production and quality -- so, one of the things they do is to get rid of safety measures because it slows down production.

'There is no short-term answer to problems confronting workers in the States and everywhere. It has to start from the top and work its way down -- the politicians should be made to answer for the problems there.'

See Also:

Letter from a GM worker in New York state

'We, the workers, have no voice in the union or in management decisions.'

[4 July 1998]

GM worker reviews the experiences of three decades

How the auto industry and the UAW have changed

[2 July 1998]

Australian car workers speak on GM strike

[30 June 1998]



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