

Letter from a GM worker

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

4 July 1998

The *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing below an E-Mail letter sent by a General Motors worker in upstate New York in response to the interview posted July 1 with Jim Lawrence, a recently retired GM worker from Dayton, Ohio. Over the past number of weeks the WSWS has received a steady influx of letters concerning our coverage of the auto workers' strike against GM.

One of the most important functions of our web site is to develop a dialogue with workers in the US and internationally on the common conditions and struggles they confront. In this letter, the writer relates his experiences with the company and the United Auto Workers union. We urge auto workers around the world to send in comments and questions, and share their own experiences and problems with their fellow workers, via the *World Socialist Web Site*.

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To the Editor:

I enjoyed the article very much. I am glad to find a place where somebody finally listens to the worker. I have worked for GM for thirty-plus years. I am located in upstate New York and work for GM's Powertrain Massena plant.

At one time we had 1,300 people working at our plant. That was 1985. The company said that we weren't making a profit and that we had to make concessions. This area up here is somewhat depressed, and so we were all kind of afraid of losing our jobs. The local union (UAW Local 465) said that we had to

make concessions or we were out the door. We did.

We gave up our lunch and went to an eight-and-a-half-hour shift. We eliminated all skilled trades classifications except two. We developed the 'team concept' and became cross-trained to be able to do a number of jobs.

There were smiles on a lot of faces because we thought we had saved our jobs. In 1986 the company said that they were going to downsize the plant. Some 1,200 jobs went to our sister plant in Bedford, Indiana. The union and the company had us competing with Bedford to save our jobs. We in all actuality did a better job, but the 14th floor (GM headquarters) chose Bedford, for the simple reason that the head of our division didn't like coming so far north. Even the people at Bedford couldn't understand why Massena was downsized when we were making more of a profit than they were. The union knew all of this and lied to us from day one.

Today we have 400 people working in the plant. All the people that wanted to come back from Bedford are back, and we have hired about 100 new people. They are working for eight dollars an hour less than I am, but doing the same work. This was another union concession that we didn't know anything about.

The team concept now is only on paper. We no longer share in production decisions like we used to. The union hardly is ever on the floor. They are constantly in meetings with management, padding their jobs.

They have taken away our good insurance benefits and stuck us with those that are only one quarter as good. This has helped to reduce costs. I could go on and on, but there is no sense. The story is the same all across the UAW.

I agree with Jim. We, the workers, have no voice in

the union or in management decisions. We are told in a very nice way just the way it's going to be, and the union is going right along with them. They give us all these big words and tell us it is for the good of the company, our families, and the community.

We have become slaves to our own union. We dare not raise our voice anymore, because if we lose these jobs, there is nothing left up here but five-dollar-an-hour jobs, and we are constantly reminded of that.

Thanks for listening and keep up the good work. If it hadn't been for the strike in Flint, I would never have found this page. Thank you once again.

MJR

3 July 1998

See Also:

GM worker reviews the experiences of three decades

How the auto industry and the UAW have changed

[2 July 1998]



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