GM worker in Syracuse writes to WSWS

"The UAW cannot serve both the membership and the corporation"

7 July 1998

To the Editor:

In December 1992, workers at the Inland Fisher Guide plant in Syracuse received the devastating news that General Motors had plans to close our facility. Terms for our plant closing were apparently negotiated between GM and United Auto Workers national officials. One of the terms required us to accept job offers at a GM engine plant in Tonawanda, New York, approximately two and a half hours away.

Workers who resisted GM's ultimatum were involuntarily placed on a leave of absence without eligibility for benefits, which include supplemental unemployment benefits, tuition assistance, guaranteed income stream, medical benefits, and pension accumulation. We were told that this extension of the contractual 50-mile area hire was to enable workers to stay with GM.

But if the intention was to benefit workers, why did refusal of this offer result in loss of all benefits? Working in Tonawanda means either relocating families or living separate from family during the week. In effect, workers were stripped of the safety net which was supposed to protect them if GM closed the plant. Workers choosing to remain in their home community have become victims of GM's strategy to cut 74,000 workers from its payroll.

How can the UAW condone such mistreatment? What assurance can they give members who relocate that the plant they transfer to will not be closed or sold? What does a future of insecurity and moves mean for our families? What about our communities? Can it be that the UAW is assisting GM in saving $5 billion worth of liability owed to laid-off workers?

The UAW cannot serve both the membership and the corporation. It is my belief that the UAW has crossed the line and is now focused on the profitability of GM, instead of the welfare of its members. Cherished union principles of solidarity, seniority as opposed to favoritism, and defense of workers against corporate abuse have been replaced by competitiveness.

Thirty-two workers remaining in Syracuse contested GM's placing us on an involuntary leave of absence and UAW Local 854's breach of its duty of fair representation. As a result, we filed a lawsuit in federal district court. The outcome of our efforts was more devastating than the loss of jobs.

Judge Rosemary Pooler found that our action was not commenced within the six-month statute of limitation. Our appeal before the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was dismissed and determined to be without merit.

Thanks, *World Socialist Web Site*, for providing a platform for GM workers to speak. Until workers take control of their own destinies, they will be like sheep led to the slaughter by their so-called labor leaders.

DS

July 6, 1998

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]

Las Vegas convention highlights UAW's crisis

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