

How the UAW promotes anti-Mexican chauvinism

A case in point

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A recent incident at a General Motors plant in Pontiac, Michigan is a graphic example of how the United Auto Workers leadership seeks to channel workers' anger over the destruction of jobs down the reactionary path of anti-Mexican chauvinism. The case involves a group of visiting auto workers from GM's assembly plant in Silao, Mexico who were being trained at the company's Truck Validation Center in Pontiac.

On August 6 UAW Local 594's shop committee filed a grievance with the company complaining that the Mexican workers were doing the jobs normally performed by local union members in violation of the local UAW-GM agreement. In a leaflet issued to the membership Local 594 President Ron Miller said the union demanded that, 'all of these foreign Mexican employees be removed from the premises.'

At the same time union officials aired their complaints to the automotive editor of the local newspaper, the *Oakland Press*, who wrote a front-page story entitled, 'Visiting Mexican workers upset UAW.' The author of that article acknowledged to the *World Socialist Web Site* that the union was also the source of rumors that the Mexican workers might be illegal aliens working in the US without permission.

If this incident was indeed a violation of the local contract, the union was remarkably selective in choosing this case to enforce the agreement. The Silao workers were not doing anything different from other GM workers who were visiting the validation center at the time from the Janesville, Wisconsin and the Pontiac West plants. Since the facility opened in 1996 scores of GM workers from throughout the US, Canada and Europe have worked there without any similar protests

from the UAW.

Moreover, as every GM workers knows, UAW committeemen regularly turn a blind eye towards supervisors doing workers' jobs, not to mention the countless other violations management carries out each day.

The incident has all the earmarks of an attempt by the UAW officials to stoke up an anti-Mexican witchhunt against the visiting workers. After all, the local president did not issue a leaflet saying, 'We have a dispute with management and mean no offense to our Mexican brothers.' They made no attempt to contact the workers to discuss the issue. On the contrary, everything the UAW officials did was to imply that it was the 'foreign Mexican workers' who were threatening Pontiac workers' jobs, not GM.

When the WSWs contacted Local 594 to discuss the matter, a union officer who refused to identify himself said he would not comment on the grounds that he did not speak to socialist journals.

The promotion of American nationalism has long been the stock and trade of the UAW bureaucracy. The more the UAW has promoted labor-management 'partnership' and collaborated with GM in the destruction of workers' jobs and working conditions, the more the union officials have attempted to whip up hatred against auto workers in the other countries. During the 1980s the enemy was the Japanese and German worker. In the recent GM strike, the UAW denounced Mexican workers for 'stealing American jobs' and the same time it signed an agreement to suppress local strikes while GM carries through its downsizing and restructuring plans.

The destruction of jobs in the US and the shifting of

production to low-wage areas is of great concern to workers. However, the only way to conduct a fight against a global corporation like GM is for American workers to unite with their brothers in Mexico, Canada and throughout the world in a common struggle against the profit system. This is only possible on the basis of championing the rights of all auto workers to well-paid jobs, and rejecting the chauvinist outlook of the UAW bureaucracy which aids the auto bosses in dividing and weakening the working class.

See Also:

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