

Letters on US auto workers' struggle

23 October 2007

Below is a letter from the wife of a Chrysler worker at the St. Louis (South) assembly plant in Fenton, Missouri. Over the weekend workers at the plant rejected the United Auto Workers-Chrysler contract by a 79 percent margin, two days after co-workers at a sister plant, St. Louis (North), voted the deal down by 81 percent.

This is followed by a letter from an autoworker with 31 years seniority.

We invite auto workers and their supporters to email the WSWs to discuss developing a struggle independently of the UAW in defense of jobs and living standards.

I printed an untold number of your articles and my husband distributed them throughout the plant. This is the St. Louis South plant (UAW Local 110) that makes minivans. He commented to me the other day, he had noticed someone had taken your article and made many more copies. There was also a three-page handout with similar points specific to the contract that was distributed by another group within the UAW upset with this contract.

Yesterday, the St. Louis North plant (UAW Local 136) that makes the Dodge Ram rejected the contract overwhelmingly, by 81 percent, according to the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. The paper quoted their union president saying he was surprised it was rejected by such an overwhelming margin.

I have a lot of hope that it will be voted down by Local 110. Most of my husband's coworkers are very upset but there are plenty as well that are satisfied to throw everyone else under the bus as long as they keep their wages.

My husband has been very upset for quite some time over this contract, and, in fact, we've been dreading it since the last one. But this week, he's very angry. I've tried my best to calm him down. He seems to be very popular with the rank and file, but the higher-ups in the union know he's a rebel and rabble-rouser.

We are very unhappy with the aspects of the contract you would expect. Mostly it's the higher-ups selling us out to enrich themselves. The two-tier wage thing seems to be what upsets people the most. I'm sure this is going to cause a lot of problems in this plant. Tensions have been on the last thread of the rope for quite some time anyway. And, of course, there's the VEBA [Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association]. If Cerberus didn't have the money to take care of its obligations to retirees, they shouldn't have bought the company.

There is also the core and non-core language and the COLA [Cost-of-Living Allowance] diversion. Then there are all the loopholes in the language and no guarantees of any future products in the majority of plants. There was a bit of media hysteria this week in the plant when the local news reported on an article in the *New York Times*, which stated St. Louis South could be closed. Most everyone understood this as Chrysler's usual threats. This plant was just retooled over the summer, supposedly to be able to make at least three products.

We are very unhappy with the measly three grand signing bonus, as well. This was supposed to be a good size bonus in exchange for selling us out, but it's the same amount it always is. We are hoping they will sometime in the near future offer a halfway decent buyout, but we know it won't be enough. We are very weary of dealing with this and we are just ready to move on. My husband has less than 20 years seniority, so I don't look for it to happen.

He's also tried to get people to understand that if the two tier wages are accepted Chrysler will be setting up the higher paid people to fire them. I think he's changed several minds, but clearly not all of them. I will be highly disappointed if this local passes it. Thanks so much to you and everyone at WSWs for taking a stand for us. We appreciate it more than I could ever put into words.

Sincerely,

R

St. Louis, Missouri

19 October 2008

Let me begin with the fact that I know what you are saying about the condition of the middle class is true. We will be extinct in 20 years. How do I know this? It's very simple. I am a 31-year employee of the auto industry with a wife, a freshmen in college and a sophomore in high school and not a lot of money socked away. I have seen these events unfolding for the last 20 years. How can a nation which led the world in productivity for 100 years be turned into a third world nation?

Sharing the wealth must have been removed from the dictionary somewhere along the line. Our founding fathers are rolling over in their graves. I am disgusted with the direction our country has taken. When the UAW called a strike at GM, for a moment I thought this is it—A LAST A STAND! we are going to fight for the future of America. I was ready, with all of my bills and lack of money I was willing to sacrifice my job. I went and signed up for picket duty and the next day I woke up to the news that an agreement was reached at 3 a.m.

Wow I thought for a moment I was an extra in the film *Wag the Dog*. At that time I finally swallowed the ugly truth that the fix was in and my golden years will not be pleasant. I had seen the company and the union restructuring the plant to fit their needs over the last four years. Area leaders hounding group leaders to harass high seniority employees, assembly line jobs set up to work 60 seconds of one minute, an appointed union position for every letter from A to Z.

Four years ago at our plant we were hastily told to vote yes. But the union never mentioned that the union group leaders that worked hand in hand with management were getting to keep their \$4-an-hour more in pay for life. These people were let loose in the general population. I had the pleasure of doing the same job as one, with him making \$4 more an hour than me. This was another block of caucus voters beholden to management and the union. I was appalled. But what I am really sick to my stomach about is most people are not happy about it but fail to stand together. This is the ME generation when it comes to the union.

In the next few years the union people will work

seven days a week, while Goldfinger and his layers upon layers of union personnel will pocket their winnings and the auto companies will quit making vehicles in the US. Stockholders will never be satisfied; why even pay \$14 an hour when you can put all their plants in Mexico and pay \$3 an hour? Only then will people stand together and that means revolution baby!

PJ

20 October 2007



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