

American Axle strikers in Detroit respond to plant closing threats

Our reporting team
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On Thursday a WSWWS reporting team spoke to American Axle strikers on the picket line in Detroit about the threat by CEO Richard Dauch to close the factories where workers are presently on strike.

In an interview with *Detroit Free Press* columnist Tom Walsh, Dauch said, "We have the flexibility to source all of our business to other locations around the world, and we have the right to do so." Walsh added that it was a "not-so-veiled threat" based on the fact that AAM has plants in Mexico, South America, Europe and Asia.

Striking American Axle auto workers responded with anger and defiance at the latest attempt by Dauch to break the strike and force the workers to accept a 50 percent cut in their wages.

Rick said, "If we don't fight this tyrant (Dauch) we will have bread and soup lines. Now is the time to fight. If they say go back in and don't worry about the money?that would be a mistake. If we can't survive on \$200 strike pay, how can we survive on what they want to pay us? We might as well stay out."

Rick remarked on the fact that strikers were getting only \$200 a week even though UAW controls a strike fund worth almost \$1 billion. "It's been 30 years since they had a big strike - they have all that money in the strike fund."

Rick told the WSWWS that there were signs that the police were starting to become more aggressive too. "We had a rally on Monday and on Tuesday; they ticketed our cars and towed a few away," he said.

Several workers expressed the feeling that American Axle would move out jobs regardless of whether or not workers agreed to pay cuts. One worker said, "He wants us to take cuts, but all he wants is to take our money and move the jobs out anyway."

Many workers said the huge payouts to Dauch and

other auto executives only made them more angry and determined. "There was a multi-million dollar package for (Ford CEO Alan) Mulally too," one worker said. "Corporate greed, that's all it is. Dauch made a profit every year - the very first day here he made a profit. We will stay out another month if that's what it takes; another two months if that's what it takes."

Brian, a worker with 14 years said he worked at the forge unit before moving to the gear division. Brian complained that the UAW kept workers in the dark in the period before the strike. "We didn't hear anything before we went out on strike. Our shop chairman never said one word. We didn't even know we were going on strike."

Commenting on Dauch he noted, "His plan was to feed us a bunch of crap at every town hall meeting - to tell us everything was fine. Then, at the last town hall meeting he told us we would have to take concessions or he would have to move.

"Go to the people who put you where you are at and tell them to take concessions?! He says he wants us to go back to work and earn enough to just stay alive. He is figuring that the less he gives us the more we will be forced to come back in to work every day."

Gene, an American Axle worker with 14 years said, "Since Ford, Chrysler and GM signed concessions, Dauch wanted the same thing. It is not because he can't afford to pay current wages. Delphi and everyone are taking concessions, so he wants it.

"Now he says he wants to send everything out to China and elsewhere. But this business has already been bid out, so he will just stick the concessions in his pocket. We are not stupid." Gene noted that Dauch owns 30 percent of American Axle stock. "You can imagine how much his stock will go up if we sign concessions; he will go from being a millionaire to

being a billionaire.”

Gene also expressed his views of the broader political developments at home and abroad. “There has been an assault on the working class ever since Bush got into office. On the mortgage crisis - he is saying ‘people made the wrong decisions’, but I don’t have a crystal ball, I can’t see the future. People made a decision to buy a house based on the information they had.

On the war in Iraq, Gene said, “We are doing nothing for the people in Iraq. When this is over Bush will probably get a huge check from Halliburton. Bush does not care about any working class individual, but when Bear Stearns got in trouble, he rushed to help them out.”

Gene concluded by stating his opposition to the past union busting in Detroit. “The newspaper strike in 1995 was a disaster. It showed Dauch what could be done. If they get these wage cuts at American Axle it will be used as a springboard to lower wages somewhere else.”

Ron said he thought the threat by Dauch to move plants overseas was a scare tactic. “This threat by Dauch that he will move the production to another location - it’s the fear factor that he is trying to create. He can’t get things out. Dauch doesn’t have the capability to get things out of here. He knows that people are hurting, and his aim is to get us to jump at his offer.

“It is absolutely terrible the way they are treating us. It is almost like we are in a third world country. They believe they can do anything.”

Walter, a worker with many years at American Axle, said, “In my view the International union is part of the conspiracy along with the companies. They want to drive workers out who have one ounce of consciousness of previous struggles and bring in a new work force for \$10-12.00 an hour. They want them to do double and triple the work and at the same time use them to expedite the transfer of their jobs to countries that pay even less. The companies are pursuing global interests and it is all for the purpose of making more and more money.

“The UAW is part of this plan. How can Gettelfinger, who oversaw concessions at Chrysler, Ford and GM and now has control of the VEBA retiree health plan, speak for me? The union itself is a stock holder; in fact they are one of the largest of the stockholders and represent that same corporate world.

“Workers are going to have to consider a revolutionary response,” Walter said.

“All the workers in America will have to come together and transcend color and gender lines. It has been difficult being out on strike for a month but there is an experience we’ve had which has been quite positive. The workers at American Axle, black, white and woman workers have come closer together. Some of the tension I experienced at work are no longer present. More than ever we see each other as one. We are all in the same boat fighting against a vicious corporate- and government-sponsored attack.

“The tensions on the picket line were very, very high,” Walter said. “All the cars were ticketed and the police made us move them. Two of the cars were broken into and this was most likely organized by company thugs. A group of supervisors boldly came out driving trucks doing our work. They are deliberately trying to create some type of riot scene. They know that workers are having a hard time.”



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