

Letters on the American Axle strike

14 April 2008

The following is a selection of recent letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site on the strike at American Axle & Manufacturing. The strike by 3,600 workers in Michigan and western New York state against draconian concessions demands by the company is in its seventh week.

I am sick and tired of the *crap* that Dick Dauch and American Axle are trying to dish to their employees and their families. I can't believe that this man has the nerve to sit there and offer insulting wages with insulting "buy downs" and "buy outs." He should be ashamed of what he is putting our 3,600+ families through. Let's not forget the other hundreds of thousands families that are being affected by this strike too. Not only in our country; but worldwide.

He seems to think that his "buy downs" and "buy outs" will be "cushy and comfy" for his employees. These figures must be enough to replace the 14 years my husband has at the company, the fact that we have to completely start over somewhere else, without the same pay and allow our families to keep our houses. In my opinion, this man will never offer enough for the damage that has already been done and the wrath we are about to endure.

He smugly accepts a huge salary and bonuses while he threatens to close our plants because we aren't making a profit large enough. However, he fails to announce to the world that these five plants fund the off shore plants and the off shore plants that rake in the profits. How do you expect my husband and his co-workers to produce enough to finance all of these operations? Meanwhile, he is taking machines out of my husband's plant and sending them to non-union plants. It's a disgrace! *American Axle*—yeah, real American.

I resent the fact that he is turning our lives upside down. I resent the fact we have to start over. I resent the fact we may have to *try* and sell our home and my kids may have to leave their school and the friends they know. Above all, I resent the fact that this is all because of one company's greed!

I hope the whole Dauch family and members of the board can sleep well at night with their million dollar salaries, knowing their jobs and salaries are safe. Meanwhile, we are worrying and wondering how we are going to repair this financial and emotional mess that he has thrown us into. We can only hope that he acquires a conscience before it's too late!

JG

11 April 2008

After watching WXYZ Detroit news I couldn't help but ask myself, Who is paying? Yesterday I was watching the 12:00 news when they aired a story about the police presence at the Manoogian Mansion for the protest going on [demanding the resignation of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick]. The question was posed, Who is paying the bill for the police? I shortly sent them a letter asking who is paying for the large police presence at American Axle. At the mansion I happened to see three police officers! Whereas at American Axle there are at least 5 to 10 cars present all the time. I ask you this question: Could this be

the Fleecing of the Citizens of Detroit?

RF

Allen Park, Michigan, USA

10 April 2008

For over 10 years we have sacrificed ourselves. Everyday we gave the company 100 percent. If we had to meet a schedule, we did it. If a machine was broken down, we fixed it so we didn't lose any parts and production time. We worked through breaks and lunches because the parts had to go out. The machinery ran at 100 percent and breakdowns were rare.

Working in a forge is constant danger; never let your mind wander. Running a 3,000-ton press that forges 42 lb. steel billets at 2,300 degrees with 4-foot tongs is not for the weak of heart. It's dangerous, very dangerous—one wrong move and your arms are gone or the top of your head is blown off because the part flew out of the press or the dies shattered from the wear and tear on the machine. But that's part of the job. You know what can happen and have to always be careful.

The noise is deafening throughout the plant. Every machine in the facility can kill you in a heartbeat if you are not careful. You learn to live with the noise, the cold in the winter and the extreme heat in the summer. You become numb to the noise, cold and heat and the 2,300 degree parts all around you, the constant danger of moving machinery and tons of parts moving around you, because you have a job to do and are expected to produce parts. But that is okay since it's your job, your choice. Not everyone can work in a forge. Physically demanding as well as mentally demanding. Not for the weak of heart.

There used to be a time when going through the gate you would mentally say "thank you" to yourself for this job. It provided good pay and benefits so you could provide for your family. Many of us sacrificed our bodies for the job. My hand was blown up due to a faulty motor starter and the skin on three of my fingers was melted off. Seven weeks later I came back to work. I could have stayed out longer, but I had a job to do. I'm not the only one with this attitude towards work. We all feel this way. We were grateful to be employed by American Axle and did whatever had to be done to keep the plant successful.

Now because of no fault of our own we make too much money? We sacrificed our health, our family time, and for some of us our lives. The only change over the years was management. All of the hourly employees are the same. Our attitude never changed, get the parts out and keep the machines running. We haven't had a raise in four years; we gave that up in order to get a contract. Management changed again. Machines that were supposed to come to our plant are now going to other little dirt floor forges where labor makes two bucks over minimum wage. Management changes again. Now machinery is being taken out of our plant to go to these locations. We have a town hall meeting and are told by the corporate execs that we make too much money, even though the salary of the corporate execs in front of us averaged about \$400,000.00 a year or better. Plus, except for one

person, none of the executives were United States Citizens. Management changes again.

What we didn't know was that during the first few years of American Axle few dollars were put into the original 5 plants to get them up and running. Then they went public and used all the profit to build plants in Mexico, China and throughout Europe and who knows where else.

At this point we knew something was going on because we were no longer allowed to completely repair the machinery to 100 percent. Just do what you can to get it to run. The existing machinery was allowed to self-destruct because we were not allowed to fix it properly for the long haul. Spare parts were rare or non-existent; the machinery was starting to fail because there was no longer a preventative maintenance program or parts.

Then we are told we are not competitive. *Really!* Letting the machinery fall apart and causing more downtime than ever before had nothing to do with it? But it's our fault.

Watching the plant fall apart after all the work and time and sweat we put in to it to make it successful is hard to watch. What's worse is that the company is putting the blame on us. They are putting us in competition with their small dirt floor plants they bought with our profits and trying to throw us out the door. So much for being loyal to your company. Never again, never again.

What is this showing to our children who are watching their parents struggle to make a good living and provide for them. To work hard everyday, never go to work late, other than vacation, never call-in just because you do not feel like going in to work. In other words you are showing your kids what a good work ethic is.

Now because of all of your work you are told that you are the reason the plant is in jeopardy. While the corporate heads walk away with millions of dollars, you are the problem, and they want more.

Our children are learning never to be loyal or trust your employer, ever. They cannot be trusted. All you are is a number, nothing else. I am a tradesman and from now on all the company is doing is renting my tools for 8 hours a day. Nothing more, nothing extra.

I do not have to teach this attitude to my children; they are seeing it first hand from their father. It doesn't do any good going the extra mile for the company, since they just pocket the money you save them and get rid of you when a cheaper labor force is found. So why bother. This is the American Way nowadays. I feel sorry for all the kids out there.

I hope all the Multinational Corporations out there realize what they are creating: An entire workforce, and possibly the next generation of employees, who will not trust them. Knowing that they are just a number. Why bother even looking for a good job because if it's a good paying job it is only temporary until you can be replaced by cheaper labor. Here or overseas. I'd bet on overseas.

Mike

Cheektowaga, New York, USA

4 April 2008

Jerry White responds:

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your moving letter. I would differ, however, with your remark that part of the problem is that so few of the executives at American Axle are US citizens. Supposing that this is true, do you think it would be any different if all the executives were US citizens? The fact is that workers of every country confront a ruling elite whose only interest is the accumulation of profit. Executives in the US who happen to be US citizens have no more concern for American workers

than they have for the workers of Mexico, China, or any country. In our view, the interests of the working class of every country are fundamentally the same.

Best regards,

Jerry White for the WSWS

Being a member of UAW for over 40 years, we union members of local 364 UAW at Conn-Selmer, a division of Steinway Musical (LVB), one of the largest manufacturers of musical instruments in the world, have been on strike for going on two years now. The issues in our strike are very similar to the strike at American Axle, except that our CEO Dana Messina makes the CEO at American Axle look like a choirboy. After forcing workers to the street, Messina took death benefits away from long retired employees, and withheld 401(k) benefits from employees and their ability to borrow against it. All this along with an approximate 50 percent wage and benefits reduction and pension elimination, while in the process of getting the union decertified.

We strikers are awaiting the final results of the National Labor Relations Board ruling on the decertification vote, as the company has seen fit to challenge most of the striking workers' votes, contending we have all been permanently replaced. We do not hope for any relief from the Republican-controlled NLRB, and this union and we workers will be dissolved.

Messina, who was a partner with the famous corporate criminal Michael Milken when they worked for Drexel, Burnham & Lambert continued in his corrupt ways after Milken went to prison. Although we here at Conn-Selmer only number a few hundred compared to the larger American Axle, our suffering has been just as great and for a much longer time.

DK

Edwardsburgh, Michigan, USA

12 April 2008

I am an employee at Colfor (owned by American Axle), and member of UAW Local 4199 here in Ohio. We have 90 percent of our work force laid off because of the strike. I have also been on our executive board since 1999. I have been Vice President, steward and currently a Trustee. I have done many rallies, conferences and training, but the last year or so I have been doubting if I believe in the union's direction and purpose other than making money for itself. The UAW is nothing more than a labor corporation. Granted we have benefited since our start in April 1999, but where will we be in 5 years? Shut down while the UAW keeps our \$300,000.00 plus? Who has more corporate greed, UAW or AAM?

As I bash my own union, I support my brothers and sisters on strike. They have no choice but to fight for their well-being.

TR

13 April 2008



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