

# Indianapolis workers denounce GM-UAW threats

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Following an explosive union meeting Sunday in Indianapolis—in which workers shouted down officials from the United Auto Workers union and drove them from the meeting—all the forces of the establishment have united to intimidate the workers at the General Motors stamping plant into taking wage and benefit cuts.

GM announced Tuesday that it plans to stop production at the Indianapolis stamping plant in June 2011, in a move that auto workers condemned as a naked effort to blackmail them into accepting concessions.

“The plan is to have all the dies out by June; they’re moving up the closing date. It’s just another one of the ways they’re trying to scare us,” said Mark, a skilled tradesman with 18 years at the plant.

On Sunday, workers at UAW Local 23 rejected a UAW-proposed contract, which calls for a 50 percent reduction in workers’ wages and benefits as part of the plant’s sale to JD Norman, a former Wall Street speculator.

Norman took out a full-page ad in the *Indianapolis Star* on Tuesday, urging workers to drop their opposition to the sale. Meanwhile both Indianapolis Mayor Gregory A. Ballard and Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels made clear their support for selling the plant.

“When GM announced in 2007 that it would close the plant, nobody said anything. Now that the auto workers are putting up a fight, all of a sudden the politicians can only talk about how they want us to accept the contract so the plant can stay open,” said Carla, an autoworker at the plant.

Meanwhile, workers’ anger has only grown toward the UAW, which is attempting to reopen the plant’s

contract despite the fact that they voted 384-22 against the proposal in May.

“The UAW is doing this because they own stock in GM, and they want to keep their business coming in,” said Todd, a worker with ten years. “Once they finish the deal, they’ll build another 100-million-dollar golf course with our strike fund.”

“The union bureaucrats are the benefactors of my blood, and the blood of my coworkers and our forefathers,” said Carla. “The worst thing was that the international went behind our backs with this vote.”

Workers received a 14-page ‘highlights’ package of the contract on Friday and Saturday, were invited to a single informational meeting on Sunday, and were expected by the UAW to vote on the contract on Monday.

The contract being proposed by the UAW spans five years, compared to the more typical three-year period, according to auto workers. “The contract we signed in 2009 lasts till 2011; it explicitly specifies that when a plant is purchased, it will retain its old contract. Couldn’t these people wait one more year?” asked Mark.

“When you make \$15 for a family of five, you qualify for federal assistance; we’re being reduced to poverty,” he added.

“I’d like to see a UAW official do what we do every day; to avoid the molten metal and walk on the oily floors,” said Carla. “I invite anyone who thinks we make too much money to shadow me for a day; this plant is a hellhole. There are cockroaches everywhere and half the bathrooms don’t work.”

Temperatures at the plant, flared by molten metal, often reach 120 degrees, but there are no water fountains, and the plant’s supply of bottled water stays locked up unless outside temperatures reach 90 degrees.

“We have people who pass out there in the plant. In the summer, the heat in there is unbearable,” said Jennifer.

“The rumor is that they took out the water fountains because the pipes were so ancient,” said Mark.

Many of the workers in the plant had been transferred multiple times. Over 11 years as an auto worker, Jackquella, a single mother, has been at four plants. “My work has separated me from my son once,” she said.

Jennifer said conditions for temporary workers were even worse. “I get no vacation pay, no holiday. Right now I make 15.60 per hour. I don’t get raises; I’m on the outside looking in.” Jennifer’s daughter has been uninsured for three years, but can’t get Medicaid. She and her husband have to pay all medical expenses out of pocket.

Despite these difficulties, she says she will stand up for her high-seniority brothers and sisters, who are losing out far more than temps. “If I were to go in there and vote for this contract, I wouldn’t be any better than a scab. For the union to say we’re going to go back to the 1950s is unacceptable.”

Workers said they saw themselves fighting not only for their own conditions, but also for those of all workers. “If one plant folds, it’s only a matter of time before another plant does,” said Mark. “If we let this happen the next move they’ll make is to go to another plant and say, ‘We’ll ship your work to Indianapolis unless you take a pay cut.’

“I couldn’t look at myself in the mirror if I knew I had something to do with another man losing his livelihood,” he said.



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