

# Indianapolis auto workers determined to resist wage cuts

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Workers at the General Motors Indianapolis Stamping Plant continued their standoff with GM and the United Auto Workers union, amid mounting pressure to accept demands to sharply reduce wages or face the loss of their jobs.

On Wednesday, the *Indianapolis Star* carried a lead editorial denouncing workers for "stubbornness" for standing up for their wages, and saying "in their anger they're ready to burn down the future not just for themselves but also for hundreds of other employees..." The editorial concluded, "the days are gone when workers at the plant could command \$29 an hour in pay plus benefits."

At a union meeting on Sunday, hundreds of workers shouted down demands by the UAW leadership that they accept a fifty percent wage cut to sell the plant to JD Norman Industries. The union officials were forced to leave the building after workers prevented them from speaking.

Under the terms of the current UAW-GM contract, the 650 workers at the stamping plant are guaranteed the same wages and conditions under a new owner. Workers have repeatedly resisted demands from the UAW and GM that they reopen the contract.

Justin D. Norman, a 34-year-old former Morgan Stanley broker who is seeking to purchase the plant, has launched campaign to discredit the "no" vote by workers, claiming only a minority of workers showed up at the union meeting. At a press conference Wednesday, Norman said, "I firmly believe you can't let a very loud minority take this facility down. We have to give them a chance to vote up or down." UAW Region 3 Director Maurice Davison echoed this lie, telling the *Star* that more than two-thirds of the membership had not been heard from.

The UAW, the corporations and the media have not suddenly developed a concern for the democratic rights of workers. After all, last May workers voted by a margin of

384 to 22 to reject any talks with JD Norman. The only concern of these forces is that workers vote, and vote again until they 'get it right.'

Workers who attend Sunday's meeting told the *World Socialist Web Site* that a large majority of the 650 workers at the plant showed up at the meeting, and that they were determined to prevent the reopening of the contract and the imposition of poverty level wages.

The Indianapolis Star carried on Wednesday a letter to the editor from a stamping plant worker, which pointed out that the UAW now owned 17.5 percent of GM and that union executives had a direct financial interest in imposing wage and benefit concessions on their members. "How can they tell us what's best for us if they have an interest in the bottom line?," It noted that the new UAW president Bob King is seeking to "turn the union bargaining gains back 60 years."

In a discussion with the WSWWS on Wednesday, stamping plant workers expressed their opposition to wage cuts and hatred of the UAW bureaucracy, whose concessions have done nothing to save jobs. Since 1986, the number of jobs at their plant has fallen from 5,600 to 650.

The workers took pride in driving the UAW officials from their meeting, and recounted the story to the WSWWS.

UAW officials called Sheriff's deputies to the union hall an hour and a half before the meeting started, according to workers, and stayed in the building until the meeting began.

"The meeting only lasted a few minutes," Tim, a young worker told the WSWWS. "When they handed the floor to the UAW International representatives, the meeting exploded, the representatives left the room, and they had to shut it down." Amy, the wife of an autoworker who was waiting outside the building, said she saw UAW representatives leave the room "with huge scowls on their faces," before driving off.

"The union wanted us to vote on Sunday to destroy our agreement," said Tim. "In May we overwhelmingly rejected the proposal to re-open the contract. But the union and management want us to vote again and again until they get what they want. That's how they operate. In 2007, the UAW local and the International made us vote three times until the concessions finally passed."

"The union isn't standing behind us; or maybe they are, but only to push us off the cliff," said Angela, a worker at the plant. Workers were angered by the fact that the International and regional representatives had just voted themselves a five percent pay raise, but were calling on them to give up half their wages.

"They just want us here to train the new hires before we lose our jobs," said Jennifer. "JD Norman has no idea how to run a stamping plant. They need the experienced workers in order to keep it operating. That's why they can't just lay off everybody and bring in temps."

"GM can't afford to shut down this plant," said Angela. "The other stamping plants don't have capacity. We can press more tonnage. When other plants have problems, they send them down to us," she added. The plant sends parts to assembly plants in Lansing Delta Township, Hamtramck, Pontiac and Flint in Michigan; Marion and Ft. Wayne in Indiana; Parma, Ohio; Wentzville, Missouri; Oshawa, Ontario; and Fairfax, Kansas.

"If workers shut down this plant all of GM would close," she said. "That's what happened in 1996 when we went on a four-day strike." If they were to go on strike, they would violate the no-strike clause agreed to by the UAW, she added. "They've essentially made it illegal for us to go on strike," said Angela.

"We're fighting for us and for everyone," said Tim. "What happens here is going to happen to the next plant and the next plant. After Sunday's meeting I got a message on my Facebook page from a worker who said, 'keep up the fight.' We know if they take from us now, they are just going to come back for more tomorrow."



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