

Indianapolis auto workers take a courageous stand

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Auto workers at the Indianapolis stamping plant of General Motors have taken a courageous stand against the gang-up of the company and the United Auto Workers union to force through a 50 percent wage cut. At a meeting Sunday rank-and-file workers shouted down officials from UAW headquarters in Detroit and drove them from the meeting.

The visceral hostility to the highly paid union executives reveals a healthy class instinct. The stamping plant workers recognize that they have nothing in common with officials who take home six-figure salaries by forcing workers to accept the slashing of jobs and wages by the corporations.

The effort to browbeat the rank-and-file into accepting wage cuts from \$29 an hour to \$15.50 an hour continues with the full-page ad in Tuesday's *Indianapolis Star*, placed by JD Norman, the company which aims to purchase the stamping plant from GM and transform it into a low-wage sweatshop.

Both company owner Justin D. Norman, a 34-year-old former stockbroker turned auto industry parasite, and Maurice Davison, the director of UAW Region 3, make the same argument, claiming that the workers who turned out for Sunday's meeting did not represent the majority at the plant.

Norman's ad declares, "I do not believe that only a few vocal opponents should determine the fate of this great manufacturing plant." This sentiment is echoed by Davison, who told the *Star*, "Out of the 600 that work there, about 200 were carrying that message (to deny a vote). I wonder about the 400 that didn't come out to that meeting."

Neither company nor union official refer to the vote on May 26, when the rank-file, by an overwhelming majority of 384 to 22, rejected any talks with JD Norman. The UAW has sought to overturn this

democratic decision and ram through the wage cut against the will of the workers. The union is working as a full partner of GM and JD Norman.

The Indianapolis workers have dealt a blow against this conspiracy against their jobs and living standards, but Sunday's action is only the first step. Broad support must be mobilized among working people, in Indianapolis, throughout the state and nationally, or this struggle will be isolated and defeated like so many others before.

The starting point for such a struggle is the recognition that the UAW is a tool of management. In the UAW workers confront an enemy just as vicious as the corporate bosses and the big business politicians.

The decline and fall of the UAW has been a protracted process, but the transformation has been complete. Bureaucrats like Maurice Davison and the army of international service reps, regional directors and other company agents on the national and local level have economic interests that are entirely divorced from those of the rank-and-file. Just in the period from 2001 to 2008, the membership of the UAW declined from 701,000 to 431,000, a decline of 40 percent, but the union's assets increased from \$1.1 billion to \$1.2 billion.

As part of the bankruptcy agreements with GM and Chrysler, the UAW became a huge stockholder in both companies, through the VEBA, giving the union executives a direct financial incentive to cut labor costs and boost the share value of the companies. In exchange for this payoff, the UAW agreed to cut the wages of new hires by 50 percent and serve up their own members as cheap labor for the corporations.

The Indianapolis rebellion comes after a series of clashes between auto workers and the UAW: the

rejection of the Ford contract in November-December 2009, in the course of which Bob King, now UAW president, was shouted down at a meeting of Ford Rouge workers; the upheaval at the Fremont, California GM/Toyota plant, where local officials were booed off the platform; the rejection vote by Saginaw parts plant workers, who had a huge wage cut pushed through on a second vote a month ago.

Workers at the Indianapolis stamping plant must break free of the UAW straitjacket and form a rank-and-file committee, independent of Local 23, Region 3 and Solidarity House, to wage a militant and uncompromising struggle to defend jobs and living standards.

The stamping plant workers should occupy the factory to prevent its shutdown by GM or takeover by JD Norman. They should make an appeal for support to auto workers at GM, Ford, Chrysler and supplier plants throughout the Midwest and nationwide. Contact should be made with auto workers in other countries who are facing similar attacks. Any such appeal would be received with enormous interest, attention and support.

There was a nationwide outpouring of support for workers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago, when they seized control of their factory for five days in December 2008, after the owners sought to close the plant and renege on their obligation to pay severance. An initiative by auto workers in Indianapolis to oppose a 50 percent wage cut would evoke an even greater response.

There is no doubt that a factory occupation at Indianapolis GM—reviving the traditions of struggle established by an earlier generation of auto workers—would resonate throughout the working class. And it would call into question the basis of capitalist rule—private ownership of the means of production. For that very reason, such an action will meet with implacable opposition from the Democratic and Republican politicians, and the local, state and national government.

The fight to preserve decent-paying jobs is a direct challenge to the Obama administration, which forced GM and Chrysler into bankruptcy in order to destroy the gains won by workers through generations of struggle. The auto industry's return to profitability will be based on bringing back conditions of exploitation

not seen since the Great Depression.

While the lives and communities of workers are being destroyed Wall Street is about to make a killing from the Initial Public Offering of GM stocks this fall.

Workers must draw the appropriate political conclusion: it is necessary to challenge the profit system. The basic productive forces and the giant financial institutions can no longer remain in the hands of private individuals, controlled for private profit. The factories and banks must be nationalized and transformed into public entities, under the democratic control of the working people. This requires a break with both big business parties and the establishment of the political independence of the working class to fight for a workers' government.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all workers to support the struggle in Indianapolis and make it the starting point for a far wider mobilization of the working class against the profit system.



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