

Feigning concern for “democracy”

Corporations, UAW call for revote on wage cut at Indianapolis GM plant

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In recent days, the United Auto Workers union, former Wall Street speculator Justin Norman and General Motors have pressed ahead with their efforts to force workers at the Indianapolis GM stamping plant to accept a 50 percent cut in wages. These forces are calling for a revote on the grounds that only a “vocal minority” of workers spoke out at last Sunday’s union meeting against the concessions demands.

This position was expressed most clearly by Norman who has insisted on the pay cut as the precondition for buying the plant from GM. At a press conference Wednesday he said, “Based on the outpouring of phone calls that I have received from plant employees, I believe there is a sincere desire to listen to our offer.”

This was echoed by UAW Region 3 Director Maurice Davison who previously told the *Indianapolis 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.”

Workers at the August 15 meeting shouted down UAW International officials and drove them out of the Local 23 union hall, forcing the UAW to cancel a vote on the concessions they hoped to hold the next day.

The sudden concern for the rights of workers to express themselves is ludicrous coming from Norman, a corporate front man for GM who is using the threat of mass unemployment to tear up the existing contract and blackmail workers into accepting poverty wages.

It is even more ridiculous coming from the UAW, an organization controlled by corrupt company agents who regularly resort to rigged elections, threats and physical intimidation to impose management’s dictates.

From the very beginning the UAW, GM and Norman have shown nothing but contempt for the decisions made by the stamping workers. Last May, workers voted by a margin of 384-22 against reopening the contract and explicitly forbade the UAW to hold further negotiations. Instead, UAW International and Region 3 officials continued talks with

Norman and GM behind the backs of workers.

“The international did not proceed democratically. When we said ‘no’ back in May, they went ahead and renegotiated the contract anyway,” Tim, a young worker at the plant, told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The UAW had planned to have workers vote to reopen their contract on Sunday, then proceed to a vote on Monday, only three days after workers were first informed of a vote. This was a violation of the UAW’s own bylaws, which specify that members must be notified fifteen days in advance of any votes scheduled to take place, workers said.

UAW officials decided to hold the meeting on a Sunday, hoping the fewest numbers of workers would attend and they could browbeat them into reopening the contract. “Many workers commute long distances to this plant, and it is far harder for most to come on Sunday than on any other day. They proceeded in this manner because they wanted a low turnout,” said Angela, a worker at the plant.

Contrary to the UAW’s intentions, however, word got out about what they were up to and significantly more workers showed up determined to stop them. “Once the UAW officials had left the meeting, we said that anyone in favor of the contract was welcome to take the floor and defend it, but nobody did,” said Tim, a worker at the plant.

Auto workers also suspect that the UAW is seeking to skew a new vote by hiring additional temporary workers, who are not facing as much of a pay cut as regular employees. “They’re trying to pad the vote,” said Todd, another worker at the plant.

Such methods are typical of the UAW. Its officials are totally unaccountable to the members and are focused on one thing: securing their own income and privileges by functioning as the industrial policemen for management.

Through the proliferation of scores of labor-management schemes and investments, the UAW has insured itself a flow of income that does not depend on the number of its dues-paying members, let alone their wages and conditions. In the

meantime, it has collaborated in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the last three decades, and rolling back the wages and conditions of auto workers to the 1930s.

In return, the UAW has been rewarded a major ownership stake in the corporations. With its control of the VEBA retiree health care trust fund, the UAW executives have gone into business with one of the largest private investment funds in the US.

According to its 2009 filing with the US Labor Department, the union's national headquarters in Detroit disburses a total of \$96,477,335 in salaries and other payments to its officers, including an army of hundreds of regional directors, service reps, organizers and others who take home between \$90,000 and \$170,000 annually. Combined family salaries can run into the hundreds of thousands in the organization, which is rife with nepotism.

For example, Maurice Davison, the Region 3 director, who denounced the stamping workers, made \$150,233 in salary and perks, according to the Labor Department report. Mike Grimes, the Assistant Director UAW-GM Department who was chased from the meeting, pocketed \$132,155.

On the local level, there are countless appointees and other officials who do the bidding of the International in order to stay on the gravy train. If they don't toe the line completely they face being forced back into the plant or having the local placed under receivership.

This upper-middle-class stratum is alien from and hostile to the "members" they allegedly represent. In order to protect their common interests with management, the UAW officials resort to the most dictatorial methods. Votes are rigged, opponents denounced or physically threatened, threats of unemployment used to push through concessions and workers pitted against each other. In 2007, the UAW went to court on behalf of GM to block retirees—who have no right to vote on contracts—from taking legal action to protect their pensions and health benefits.

Even the selection of the union's president is the result of his anointment by fellow bureaucrats, not a vote of the membership.

As for abiding by the democratic votes of UAW members, the union apparatus regularly organizes "revotes" to overturn their decisions and impose management's will. The following are just a few examples:

- In June, International and local UAW officials forced 2,200 workers at the Nexteer Automotive plant in Saginaw, Michigan, to revote after they previously rejected wage and benefit concessions. Like the situation in Indianapolis, UAW officials said the wage cuts were necessary to help GM find a buyer.

- In April 2008, Workers at GM's Parma, Ohio stamping plant rejected a new local contract. UAW Local 1005

President Tito Boneta, in a letter to his members, said voter turnout was less than 50 percent for that rejection, so the union's leadership put the tentative pact up for a new vote.

- Last month workers at the Navistar foundry in Indianapolis, members of UAW Local 226, were forced to accept a 23 percent pay cut to \$17 per hour. The same deal was refused last fall by about 98 percent of the local's voters.

Stamping workers told the WSWS it took three votes for the UAW to push through the 2007 contract concessions at the plant that tore up the gains of generations of struggle.

The interest of workers can find no expression through this rotten organization. Nor can such an organization, which has been degenerating for decades, be reformed. Workers can only find a way forward by breaking with the UAW and building new, truly representative organizations, elected by the rank-and-file workers themselves, to mobilize the working class in defense of jobs and living standards, and against the corporate-government conspiracy to impoverish them.

Workers at the Indianapolis transmission plant are determined not to let the UAW's intimidation tactics succeed. "It's not going to work this time," maintained Angela. "If we fold, if we bow down under their intimidation and their propaganda we'll be the first of many plants to do so," she said. "We are not going to be responsible for undermining the livelihoods of other workers in GM; that's why we're taking a stand here."



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