

# Corporations, UAW continue campaign against Indianapolis GM workers

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The campaign by General Motors, the United Auto Workers and investor Justin Norman to force workers at the Indianapolis stamping plant to take a 50 percent wage cut moved ahead Sunday with a meeting between Norman and a small group of GM workers and their families.

Norman, a 34-year-old former stockbroker, is insisting that workers accept a reduction in pay from \$29 an hour to \$15.50 as precondition for his purchase of the factory, which GM plans to close next year. On August 15 workers shouted down and drove out UAW International executives from their local union meeting for agreeing to the concessions and defying their vote barring any talks with Norman.

The rebellion by workers caught the UAW, the corporations and the political establishment off guard. It also has provoked widespread interest and sympathy from workers around the country. Since then, the forces lined up against the workers have sought to regroup and work out a plan to force through another vote.

The UAW and Norman, backed by the local media, are peddling the claim that only a “vocal minority” opposes the deal. They claim the majority of workers are being “intimidated” by these opponents who are not interested in keeping the plant open, but only in retaining their wages and benefits by transferring to other GM plants.

In fact, all the intimidation is being carried out by the corporations, which are using the threat of another plant closure to force workers to accept poverty level wages. Norman told reporters Sunday that the first set of dies used to stamp auto parts has already been shipped to other GM facilities, and added that he hoped getting a new vote “didn’t take too long because there is a plant shutdown schedule that we are up against.”

With the assistance of the UAW, Norman has sought to cultivate support from older workers nearing retirement and from temporary workers for whom a \$15.50 wage would actually be a 44-cent raise. Exploiting high levels of unemployment in Indianapolis—where the official jobless rate approaches 10 percent and the real rate is much higher—he has claimed he will convert temporaries into full-time workers and might add jobs in the future.

Sunday’s meeting was an indication of how little support Norman’s wage-cutting plan has. Organizers tried every effort to bribe workers to come. The meeting was held at the Lucas Oil Stadium, the home of the Indianapolis Colts professional football team, and workers and their families were invited to walk on the playing field before and after the meeting. An assortment of free pastries, fruits, chips and other food was on hand. Nevertheless, the vast majority of 1,500 seats set up in a conference room beneath the grandstands remained empty.

Afterwards Norman praised the “large turnout” although only about 50 auto workers showed up. There are 660 active workers at the plant.

Despite the small number, Norman told reporters that there was “a resolve in that group to get a vote, a kind of democratic process for their voices to be heard so they could decide on their fate and their future.” He continued, “We are going to persist until a vote happens—out of respect for the employees.”

The corporations and the union have shown nothing but contempt for the democratic will of the workers. Last May workers at the plant voted by a margin of 384-22 against reopening the contract and explicitly forbade the UAW from holding further negotiations with Norman. Instead, UAW International and Region 3 officials continued talks with Norman and GM behind the backs of workers.

Norman gave particular praise to the union bureaucracy,

saying, “We have really good relations with the UAW” and “have worked really hard to put a proposal together with them.”

Referring to high levels of unemployment he was exploiting to get workers to take lower wages, Norman said, “I believe strongly that we are in a unique time in manufacturing now. And this is an opportunity—maybe it’s not something that everybody wants—but certainly there is a future for that manufacturing plant.” A wage of \$15.50 an hour, he said, was “a living wage” and said again, “it’s a great opportunity”—without mentioning for whom.

When the *World Socialist Web Site* asked Norman how much he made last year, he refused to answer and walked away.

Behind the scenes, the UAW is conspiring to push through another vote. Having been exposed for running roughshod over the decision of local union members—including the UAW Constitutional prohibition against national officers negotiating a contract without the approval of the local union—International President Bob King, Region 3 Director Maurice Davison and others are concocting a “legal” and “constitutional” pretense to hold another vote in the local and browbeat workers into accepting the concessions.

This was made clear in comments following the meeting from Glenn Sheeks, an advocate of the deal with Norman, and a “sourcing rep” for Local 23. Sheeks said that his role was to “interface between the company and the union.”

Sheeks said he shared Norman’s view that there was a “silent majority” in favor of the deal, but that they were intimidated by a “boisterous minority.” The latter, the local union official said, were like “bullies on the block” who, for no apparent reason, simply wanted the plant to close.

He said, “we can get [the vote] done, but we have to go through the proper channels.” The UAW, he said, has rules and regulations and if the proper procedure was followed, including the issuing of paper ballots to “avoid the intimidation,” he said, “I’m pretty sure it will come out.”

Asked by local reporters what the next step was, Sheeks continued, “We have to get all our ducks in a row. We have a new director, Bob King. He’s got to call for a special vote—he has got to put his stamp on it—and it’s got to go to our regional director, Mo Davison. Davison has got to include our chairman Greg Clark, our president Ray Kennedy, the executive board and the shop committee.

When all of them agree to it; then we can have a vote,” he said, adding that this could be accomplished “in a couple weeks.”

Meanwhile, state and local politicians, from Indiana’s Republican governor Mitch Daniels to Indianapolis Democratic congressman André Carson, are ramping up pressure on Local 23 leaders to conduct a revote.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed a statement pointing to the “three-way conspiracy” of the UAW, GM and Norman and warning of the dangers of leaving the initiative in their hands. The leaflet called for the unification of higher and lower seniority, temporary and full-time workers on the basis of a common struggle against wage cuts and the closure of the plant.

“Allowing the plant to close is not an alternative. That will further devastate the city and the region, undermine the wages and conditions of upcoming generations and set a precedent that will be followed at plants across the country,” the statement said.

“The real alternative is a fight to unite all the workers in the plant against both the wage cut and the plant closure. This must be prepared now with the election of a rank-and-file committee of action—completely independent of the UAW—to lay the groundwork for the occupation of the factory and the mobilization of auto workers and the working class as a whole in Indianapolis, Indiana and across the country.”

An auto worker with 15 years came to listen to Norman’s proposal despite his opposition to the contract. He told the WSWs, “I can’t make basic necessities on \$15 per hour. When I started as an auto worker 15 years ago, I was making \$12.50, and everything cost half as much.

“Some of these guys in here have got 30 years in and just want to retire, so they’re considering the contract. But what about the guy who got you what you have? Did he do it by only thinking of himself? We have to fight for the next generation.

“This is bigger than this facility,” he said. “This is a national issue. If this plant closes, what’s next?”



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