

Letters from auto workers on Indianapolis struggle

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The following letters were sent by auto workers in Indianapolis and Michigan to the WSWS in response to the ongoing struggle by workers in Indianapolis, Indiana. The workers in Indiana are resisting efforts by General Motors and JD Norman, backed by the United Auto Workers, to push through a 50 percent wage cut. For full coverage, click here.

The Editorial Board encourages auto workers to write in to the WSWS with their experiences, comments and questions, and to participate in this critical discussion on a new strategy for the working class.

Life and Times at the Indianapolis Metal Fabrication plant

When I started at Indy Metal Fab three years ago, I was under this illusion that I was getting in on something to be proud of. But as time went on my illusion has been busted apart, torn to shreds, completely shattered, to say the least. Years ago, both my grandfathers worked for GM. They worked hard and fought hard for what they had there. As hard as things got there, they were still proud of what they stood for and never regretted one minute of it. Before long, their sons worked there—my uncles. They too were very proud of the accomplishments they made working and fighting for rights there. They are now passed and gone, but if there is any afterlife at all out there I'm sure they are dropping their heads at the way the workers stand by and let everything be stolen away without even a fight.

When I started I was told I was being hired in as a seniority temp, which meant in 90 days I'd be hired. Three years later I am still a temp. I have gone from a seniority temp, to a flex temp, down to a vacation replacement temp. Three years without any type of benefits, no vacation days, no holiday pay, no VR days, which means no missing any days, no being sick, no pay for any holidays and worst of all no health benefits for my daughter.

Now, if all that isn't bad enough, you get pushed from one job to another, you get treated like every day is your first day there. The place is falling apart at the seams—120 degrees or hotter in the summer, and you're lucky if they place water out for you, freezing in the winter to the point that you are wearing Alaskan hiking gear while you work, pond puddles when it rains all through the plant. And when it is hot and there is no

water, for god's sake don't drink out of the water coolers there; they are nasty and infested with roaches.

I have gone to the meetings and asked all the right questions—from “Why am I still a temp?” to “Why don't you fight for the workers instead of giving everything they worked for away?”. They are really good at brushing you off with “I don't know” answers to not answering you at all.

We can say and tell everything we can about this, and yet no one wants to hear us. Even the media can't get it right. They have interviews, and instead of placing a video in the background of this nasty run-down plant, they put a video of one that is clean and perfect. This plant is far from clean and far from perfect working conditions. They only scream safety when it comes to the workers in specific, but them on the other hand let the most important things go to get all the parts out they possibly can. If someone gets hurt, and it was because maybe their armguard was down too low or their shirt sleeve was too short, they get written up or time off. If someone gets hurt because of something the company did wrong, they keep that hush hush. They will let a worker come in for over a week at a time and sit and do nothing and get paid to keep it from being a recordable incident. So you tell me, where does safety count here?

I guess it was easier when I was a young girl, hearing the conversations of honorable, loyal, dedicated workers. I was proud of them then and even more proud of them now. I know I have their blood running through me; this I know because I do fight for what I've earned and worked for, even if I am losing the fight. But I also know that an army of fighters goes a lot farther than just a small handful. Sometimes I wish I had lived in the days where it counted for something. Sometimes I wish people today were from that caliber of people. But they seem to be long gone, and now we are being treated like a third world country who are not educated, and that is furthest from the truth. We are educated; we just don't have the backbone to hold our heads up with pride no more. So therefore I guess we get what we deserve and better just as well like it, because the time to say something or stand up has passed right by.

Anytime workers have the power of their destiny in their hands and don't use it can only mean they are broke down, beaten down, and convinced they are fighting a losing battle. When they are to that point they might as well surrender, what

else are they going to do? Right? Whatever, once they are in that mindset I guess they are stuck there. And that makes it that much easier for people like JD Norman to lead the sheep to slaughter. And all along the people had the power in their hands to stop it.

I don't believe after my experience with GM and the UAW I will ever work for a union ever again. I would stake my life I will have better odds working for a non-union facility. I did before GM and I'm sure it will be the same after. I will never have anything good to say about them from this point on. I will discourage anyone from taking employment with them when possible. And if I had a way to apologize to my family for what has been done to their memory and hard work I surely would. I am glad that they never had to see it come to what it has become.

I read the article on the *World Socialist Web Site* about this guy JD Norman. The whole thing really got to me because I had some experience where these private investors got involved. My message for the workers down there in Indianapolis is don't put any trust in what the company says and don't put any in the union.

I worked at Dana Corp. in Auburn Hills, Michigan before the plant was closed down about two years ago. We made stuff for all the major auto companies, Ford, GM, Chrysler, KIA, Toyota, you name it. I worked making drive shafts for the vehicles. The plant manager called us to a meeting five minutes before our shift and told us the plant was closing.

But what really made me the most angry was the company faked us out with all kinds of promises and the union helped them. The union told us we would be retrained for all the good paying jobs. They told us we would get severance money, too. But there was no severance, there was no training and there were no jobs. All that was a lie. I just quit calling the union out at Dana a year ago because there was nothing.

What really got me were the lies they told. They put on a front. I was actually excited about it because I thought I would go on to a good job. But then you would call the places that were supposed to be giving you help, and the phone would ring and ring and you would never get an answer. They actually painted over the windows in that job place down on Michigan Avenue. They called it No Worker Left Behind but it turned out to be nothing.

They made all sorts of promises about the severance pay, too. They said employees with one year would get \$6,500, two years \$8,500, and on like that. I thought I was going to get \$30,000 because I've been there 12 years. But I got nothing. They played us. They really played us.

First they told us they were going to retrain us to do something else at the same plant, some other type of work. They told us our current jobs were obsolete. Come to find out there was really nothing there. There was no new investor who came in to the plant.

They told us our jobs were going to go to Mexico. They gave us six months warning. They shipped the jobs to Guadalajara, Mexico. I was one of the last people to leave the plant because I had gotten a promotion to the loading dock by then. So my last job was shipping out the machinery from the plant. Can you believe they even wanted me to go to Alabama because they had to recalibrate the machinery before they moved it and I knew how to do that? You can't really say the people in Mexico who got the jobs got rich off of us. The workers make less than a quarter of what we made so it is the companies who are getting rich.

Dana Corporation had 11,000 employees at the top of its game at that plant in Auburn Hills. When they closed it was total destruction for the city. Everybody around there, the mom-and-pop stores, the restaurants, everything in an 8-mile radius was devastated.

I worked there all my life. I was never late and didn't miss a day of work. I was never in trouble. I never was in the penitentiary or anything at all like that. I am actually skilled, a welder by trade. I can work all the different kinds of welds including water welds. But there is nothing out there now in that line of work.

There were 50 of us on the line where I worked making the drive shafts and I'm still in touch with about 40 of the people that were there. You had three who passed away in that two-year period. Out of the rest I only know of three who are employed and they are underemployed. One is a manager at Wendy's, one is at Tim Horton's, and the other works at 7-eleven. So they go from \$22 an hour down to \$8.50. How can you feed a family on that?

You should think about that. Everybody working on that line owned their own home, had a car note, had a decent life. I am one of the few who still owns their home. Now I am living from check to check. In fact I just got my last unemployment check.

One of the guys from that group committed suicide, I heard, and killed his wife. He cut the gas on and blew up his house about a year after the plant closed. That is certainly no solution I would ever take. I'm going to live one way or another. But as the colder months approach, it is going to get real nasty out here.

The things are like during the Depression, which is why I got interested in looking into another article from the *wsws.org*. It is about the Toledo Auto-Lite strike in the 1930s. I see the pictures of them battling with the police and the tear gas and all and I want to know more about it.

Tony



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