Solid support for Indianapolis workers at GM's Flint Metal Center

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The World Socialist Web Site encourages workers at the Indianapolis GM plant and all auto workers to write in with their thoughts and comments on this crucial struggle.

Auto workers at General Motors' Flint Metal Center, 60 miles north of Detroit, expressed firm support for the stand taken by workers at the Indianapolis GM stamping plant against demands for a 50 percent wage cut.

In comments made to the *World Socialist Web Site* outside of the plant Thursday, Flint workers said the fight was crucial because they would undoubtedly face similar demands if GM and the United Auto Workers were successful in slashing wages from $29 to $15.50 an hour in Indianapolis.

"We're going to be next" was a common response from workers who took leaflets of a WSWS article on the fight of the Indianapolis workers. The Flint stamping plant, which employs 1,100 workers, is one of several metal fabrication plants in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan where GM and the UAW would demand "competitive" wages if the wage cuts go through. Workers in Indianapolis have insisted that they will not be used as a cheap labor to drive down the wages of their fellow workers.

"If they get that wage cut through, you're going to get demands for a 50 percent wage cut here too," said Benny, a worker with 20 years at GM. "At Nexteer they have already cut wages to $12 an hour."

Last June the UAW rammed through brutal wage cuts at GM's Nexteer Automotive operations in nearby Saginaw after the 2,200 workers initially rejected concessions. As in Indianapolis, the UAW used the threat of a plant closing to cut wages, saying this was the only way to find a new buyer for the plant. The majority of the workforce at the plant—which started out as a GM facility, was spun off to Delphi and taken back by GM last year—is now being paid between $12 and $14 an hour.

Another Flint Metal Stamping worker said, "They just put the Orion Assembly plant on 'closed plant status' because they want to get rid of all the older, higher paid workers and put the whole workforce on the two-tier wage."

Despite the pouring rain, Flint GM workers stopped to talk with the WSWS reporting team with several gathering around to find out news about the Indianapolis workers' struggle. Many have been following their fight closely.

Having faced years of betrayals by the UAW, Flint metal workers were particularly interested to hear that workers in Indianapolis were forming a rank-and-file committee to conduct an independent struggle. Several took copies of a statement from the Indianapolis GM Stamping Rank-and-File Committee, which the WSWS reporters showed them.

Pat, a stamping worker with 30 years at GM, said, "The UAW is not elected. Now with the VEBA [retiree health care trust fund] they have a vested interest in working against us and for the company. I'm certain that in the next contract they are going to dump our pensions. It's like they are creating a system of lords and serfs in this country."

Mike, a worker with 20 years, said he never heard of a mail-in ballot to ratify a contract. "Those workers have to get on the Internet, use Facebook and everything then can to organize," he said. "We'll help them fight."

Another worker, Maria, with 36 years seniority, said it was outrageous what the UAW was doing, adding, "And the UAW is taking our money."

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Another worker, John, hired in at GM in 1978 and spent more than a decade on two different layoffs after the closure of Buick City in Flint and another GM plant in nearby Pontiac. “I should have been able to retire by now,” he said, “but the UAW has done nothing to help me. It’s scary. Who can afford to buy a car now? And how can you do it on $15.50 an hour? I’m already facing a foreclosure.

“If they can cut wages in Indy you can see the same thing coming in the next contract. All they want is cheap labor here, like in Mexico, to save money and make more profits. Delphi introduced the two-tier wages and now everybody is working for next to nothing.

“They’re taking a beating in Indianapolis; I hope they don’t take the wage cut. I’m glad the workers are standing up to the UAW.”

Flint is the site of the 1936-37 sit-down strikes that launched the UAW. Repudiating any association with past struggles, the UAW embraced a policy of labor-management “partnership” and economic nationalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It deliberately worked to crush every form of resistance against plant closings and mass layoffs. The result has been the destruction of a million auto jobs nationally since 1979. During the same period, GM’s workforce in Flint fell from 80,000 to about 5,000 today.

In 1998, the UAW sold out the 53-day strike by 8,000 workers at the stamping plant and Delphi Flint East Complex, which had crippled GM’s operations throughout North America. A year later, GM spun off its Delphi parts division. The 2005 bankruptcy of Delphi set the stage for the sweeping job and wage cuts demanded last year by the Obama administration in the forced bankruptcy and restructuring of GM and Chrysler. In exchange for its collaboration in slashing the auto workers’ wages to poverty levels, the UAW was given a substantial ownership stake in the auto companies.

Workers from other GM factories in Michigan also expressed solidarity with the fight of the Indianapolis workers. Jeff, a young worker who transferred to GM’s Willow Run facility when Pontiac Assembly was closed, said, “There are rumors our plant has already been bought by another company. They may keep it open after they said it would close. GM put in a new $800 million addition and a year later shut it down and shipped the equipment to Mexico. They are forcing me to go to a plant in Toledo, Ohio. There is a union there only in name. Guys are working 11-12 hours a day with no rights.

“I agree with the Indianapolis workers forming a rank-and-file committee,” Jeff added. “The UAW has to go. Once they got the VEBA and stocks in the company I knew that they were working against us.”

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