

Indianapolis GM workers fight new UAW vote on wage cut

Jerry White
16 September 2010

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.

Rank-and-file workers at the General Motors stamping plant in Indianapolis have begun to mobilize against the latest effort by the United Auto Workers to run roughshod over their opposition and impose a 50 percent wage cut on workers at the plant. On Wednesday, workers distributed a leaflet denouncing the betrayal of the UAW and calling for workers to join a rank-and-file committee to fight the wage cut and oppose any threat to shut the plant.

The leaflet was in response to revelations that the UAW is organizing a mail-in ballot on the proposal it has reached with investor JD Norman to buy the plant from GM, which would reduce hourly wages from \$29 to \$15.50.

On Tuesday workers uncovered an internal memo from plant manager Gary Malkus to salaried personnel at the plant, which said management had been “advised by the Region 3 and UAW International representatives that a vote will be conducted on the tentative agreements, that they have negotiated. Specifically, they have elected to use a mail-in ballot process and will employ a third party to oversee the ratification vote.”

Such a “vote” would be in complete defiance of the decision of GM stamping workers who have repeatedly voted against reopening their current contract. On August 15 workers shouted down and drove out UAW International executives from their local union meeting for agreeing to the wage cut and defying their vote barring any talks with Norman.

Taken aback by this militancy, the UAW has spent

the last month conspiring with GM, Norman, the news media and local Democratic and Republican politicians to force workers to vote again. In doing so, UAW International President Bob King, Region 3 Director Mo Davison and other UAW officials concocted the mail-in ballot scheme to prevent another local union meeting where workers will reject the deal en masse. At the same time, the handpicked “third party” will ensure the UAW gets the results it wants. The process is so outrageous that the UAW Local 23 Election Committee denounced the measure for usurping its duty to conduct all ratification votes.

The plant manager’s memo makes it clear that GM and Norman are relying entirely on the UAW to push through the wage cuts, thus allowing company officials to maintain a pretense of neutrality. “As a reminder,” the plant manager says, “this is a union-led process and we should refrain from interfering in that process.”

Ballots will be mailed out on September 17, the memo says, while International UAW officials will “answer questions” at a meeting inside the plant on September 20, and the counting of ballots will begin by September 27.

After learning of the plan, workers issued and distributed a leaflet rejecting the plan. The leaflet, a copy of which was sent to the *World Socialist Web Site*, states that if the UAW pushes through this vote, “We will not accept it as legitimate.” (See, “UAW plans new vote on GM Indianapolis wage-cutting contract”)

In a “Letter to all auto workers,” issued by the “GM Stamping Rank and File Committee,” the workers say, “The UAW knows if workers come together we will reject this deal like we have done three times before.” Noting that workers will have no way of checking the vote results, it says, “There is nothing to stop the UAW from stuffing the ballots and saying a majority voted

for the deal.”

“The UAW is working against us, not for us,” it continues. “They want to protect their six-digit salaries, management perks and golf courses by doing the dirty work for GM and Norman. They are taking our dues. That is a paid contract to protect us, not sell us out and still take our money.” Accepting the pay cut, the leaflet notes, will only make their bank accounts larger, “while ours go dry.”

“The next generation of auto workers has the right not to live in poverty and we will protect that right. No amount of threats will stop us,” they write. At the same time, they say, “We reject the ‘choice’ between a 50-percent wage cut and the shutdown of the plant. We must prepare for a fight against both. For those who have everything they have worked for their whole life at stake, this is legal robbery. For those working for their future this is slave labor. Is this the American way now?”

Calling for workers to join the rank-and-file committee, they say workers must organize independently if they are going to fight. “We must unite all workers in the plant, young and older, full-time and temporary. We call on all auto workers throughout the country to support our struggle” it continues, noting that their statement is being sent to workers at other auto plants who will be the next to face wage cut demands. “Many is a very powerful thing. If we know we are not alone in this we know we are strong.”

The leaflet concludes, “It is our responsibility to our children and their children not to let this happen. They will know history as it has happened and will know that we had a voice in this to prevent them from living a life of struggle. We must not let them down. This fight was fought years ago, and we as adults are proud of our predecessors for fighting the fight. Now it’s our turn to be looked upon the same in our future. History does repeat itself.”

Afterwards, a worker involved in forming the committee spoke with the WSWS. “Lots of people said the leaflet was the best thing they ever read. We are planning to fight this vote.”

After the local union meeting where workers threw out the International officials, she said, the UAW “spent a lot of time going through all the contingencies. It took a lot of thought, like a chess game. The

International had to fall back and regroup, and since then they’ve worked hard trying to turn temporary workers against older workers and pit us against each other.

“They want us to work for \$15.50 an hour. But the price of vehicles, groceries and heat in the winter isn’t being cut in half. People have to have the right—not just to exist—but to live and have good jobs and a home.

“Families were accustomed to buying home, vehicles, and sending their kids to college. Now they’re renting homes, kids are dropping out of college to take a factory job and young families are spending half their paycheck on daycare. The corporations and the government want two classes: the working class and the upper class.

“There are millions whose wages have been cut whose health care is being taken away. We’re a handful here that has started fighting; they should be fighting too. If everybody has the same mindset, ‘I want what I work for,’ and stood up, then they wouldn’t be able to get away with what they are doing. We are going not only against the UAW International and this company but the government and Obama too.”

The Indianapolis workers are urging auto workers throughout the country to print out their leaflet, distribute it, and take up a common fight against wage-cutting and layoffs.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact