

# Indianapolis rank-and-file committee draws worldwide support

Andre Damon  
29 September 2010

In the week since the *World Socialist Web Site* first made an appeal to its readers to send letters in support of the Indianapolis GM Stamping Rank-and-File Committee, the workers have received dozens of messages from all parts of the world expressing sympathy and solidarity with their struggle.

The Indianapolis GM workers have repeatedly defied the United Auto Workers union, which is seeking to push through a 50 percent wage cut on behalf of General Motors and corporate raider JD Norman, who is seeking to buy the plant. Last week the workers voted overwhelmingly to defeat the wage-cutting deal signed by the UAW and Norman.

Workers at the plant have formed a rank-and-file committee to carry on their struggle independently of the UAW and mobilize the widest possible support for a fight against the wage cut and the threat to close the factory.

Letters have come from over a dozen countries, including Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Japan, Sri Lanka and others. The letter writers include workers, students, academics and retired people. All express great admiration for the struggle waged by the Indianapolis workers and their decision to organize independently of the UAW.

Particularly remarkable are the letters from unionized workers, many of whom recount experiences of defeat and betrayal at the hands of their union. These workers express hatred for the union bureaucracies in their own countries comparable to that shown by the Indianapolis workers. They call for the international solidarity of all workers in a common fight for their interests.

The letters express the determination and fighting spirit of the international working class. This huge and powerful social force has been robbed and impoverished for decades, betrayed by its leaderships

and completely disenfranchised. Trade unions around the world, whether led by social democrats, Stalinists or open supporters of capitalism like the UAW, have worked to suppress the class struggle and impose the cuts in jobs, wages and benefits and the increased speedup demanded by the employers and the government.

Here are some excerpts from the letters sent to date:

- I am a bus driver for the city of Berlin and we had to accept a wage cut of nearly 20 percent seven years ago. All new young workers who join the company now get only a minimum wage of 8 euros an hour. The old drivers get 14.60 euros per hour. The bus drivers were forced by the trade union Verdi to accept the deal, and the vote on it was a fraud. ... We have to fight back. But we have two enemies in one—the unions and the state, organized by social democrats and the Left Party.

- I am a CAW (Canadian Auto Workers) member, so I understand why you have decided to do the courageous and right thing—the only alternative—by taking matters into your own hands. The CAW has done worse than nothing for us. Concessions contracts, two-tier pay structures, contracting out, backroom deals with the company, layoffs—this is what the CAW has done or helped the company do to my former co-workers and their families. Many jobs were lost, including my own, because of their actions or inaction.

- I was involved in strike action during the 1984-85 miners strike in Britain, but despite a 12-month struggle, we lost the strike. This raises the question of working class leadership and the political positions of trade union bureaucrats. ... There's one sure thing: these bureaucrats who are asking you to take this cut will never take a cut to their salaries.

- I work as a substitute teacher for the Los Angeles

Unified School District and am currently a member of UTLA (United Teachers Los Angeles). My union, like yours, has flat sold out the membership and has left it to the individual creativity of the membership/workers to dig themselves out of the hole the capitalists have dug for us all.

• We in South Africa have just experienced the brutal betrayal of our workers by the parasitic trade union leadership. Last month, 1.3 million government workers went on strike, demanding a living wage.... After 21 days of unpaid strike action, the workers were forced by the trade union leadership to concede to the employers' demands and end their strike action. The trade union leadership declared the strike a success, but the workers are poorer. The workers have been betrayed again.

These letters, which are being circulated hand-to-hand within the plant, have had a profound effect on the workers in Indianapolis. "I was struck by how everyone all over the world is facing the same situation we face, and the fact that they're all watching what we're doing," one member of the committee told the WSW. "These letters have truly been an education."

The outpouring of support from workers around the world exposes the reactionary character of the "Buy American" nationalism promoted by the UAW to drive a wedge between US workers and their brothers and sisters in other countries, while tying workers to their "own" capitalist bosses.

The miner from the UK whose letter is quoted above also wrote of the union's use of nationalism to divide and disorient workers:

• The union leaders, who are steeled in obsessive nationalism, will tell you this is the result of foreign labour. They, along with management, will blame everyone, including GM workers. They also have the full weight of the capitalist media at its disposal to blame you for their crisis. Workers must act internationally and build independently from the unions: they only serve to tie you to the nationalist flag of America. The working class is united in the same struggle globally. Your struggle is my struggle. ... I extend my fraternal solidarity with you and your families at this time.

The rank-and-file committee responded to this expression of international solidarity, writing:

• The very union we pay dues to—who are supposed to fight for us—are using our dues to take from us; we literally pay them to ruin us. They break the laws and the government won't stop them, but we can't STRIKE? When will all this end, how will it end? We have got to stand up and speak out together. I have read articles and received letters about the very same things happening in other countries as happened here. We have received letters from Australia, Canada, South Africa, all the world. ... This tells us that the politicians are banding together to take from us and line their pockets, so therefore we have to band together to stop them.

The formation of the Indianapolis GM Stamping Rank-and-File Committee is a sign of the growing international rebellion of workers against the pro-capitalist and nationalist trade unions that have betrayed them. As the letters demonstrate, workers will increasingly seek to coordinate their struggles across national borders and learn from each other's experiences.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will do everything it can to encourage this process and draw out the most essential lessons for this struggle. We encourage workers to continue writing to the Indianapolis GM Rank-and-File Committee at [indygmworkers@gmail.com](mailto:indygmworkers@gmail.com), and to send copies to the *World Socialist Web Site*.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**