

General Motors closes Indianapolis stamping plant

Andre Damon
8 July 2011

On June 30, General Motors closed its stamping plant in downtown Indianapolis. The 80-year-old plant was the scene of a struggle by auto workers last year against the efforts of GM and the UAW to cut their wages in half.

In May 2010, workers voted by a 95 percent margin against reopening their contract with GM and barred the UAW from negotiating with JD Norman, a corporate raider seeking to buy the plant. Two months later workers chased UAW International officials out of a local union meeting after the UAW executive revealed they had continued negotiations behind their backs.

The UAW then conspired with GM and state and local politicians to blackmail workers into accepting the savage wage cut, using the threat of a plant closing. Nevertheless, in September workers again voted down the UAW proposal. In retaliation GM announced it would close the facility.

The struggle at the Indianapolis stamping plant became the focal point of a brewing rebellion against the UAW. Autoworkers throughout the country knew and followed the struggle, and responded with support to the Indianapolis workers.

In response to the wage-cutting campaign by the UAW, workers at the Indianapolis stamping plant with the assistance of the Socialist Equality Party set up a rank-and-file committee to fight the threatened wage cuts and the closure of the plant. The Indianapolis Rank-and-File Committee called on auto workers to break with the UAW and mobilize their strength against the attack on the jobs and living standards throughout the auto industry. It urged workers to place no faith in the Obama administration, which had overseen the attack on workers with the forced bankruptcy and restructuring of GM and Chrysler in 2009.

statements of the committee were published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, and evoked letters of support from workers throughout the US and the world, which saw the formation of the committee as a breakthrough against organizations that have imposed the dictates of the corporations for decades.

In direct opposition to this initiative, local UAW officials in Indianapolis aided by phony union dissidents and pseudo-left supporters of the UAW, including Gregg Shotwell of Soldiers of Solidarity and Wendy Thompson of Labor Notes, did everything to block a rebellion against the UAW. This even included red-baiting campaign aimed at intimidating workers and blocking workers from collaborating with the SEP.

Tied hand and foot to the UAW apparatus—and through it to the Democratic Party—and oblivious to the devastating consequences the plant closure would produce, these middle class “lefts” were thoroughly opposed to a genuine mobilization of auto workers in defense of both their living standards and jobs. In the end, they declared the struggle a victory even though the plant was being shuttered.

The closure will mean thousands of additional job losses for the city of Indianapolis, which has lost 56,000 jobs since the start of the economic downturn. The auto bosses and the UAW will also use the closing as an object example in an effort to force workers to accept future concessions, including in the upcoming negotiations between the UAW and the Detroit Three automakers.

“I’ve watched the effect of the closure of the plant,” said Jennifer, a former employee. “Families were torn apart, there have been divorces, evictions and foreclosures; the workers believed in the UAW, believed in working in that company, and now they are

paying the price.”

The sprawling 2.1 million square foot plant used to employ 5,600 workers, but was down to 650 in 2010. It was built in 1930, and has been retooled countless times. GM began moving dies out of the facility late last year, while transferring workers to other areas of the country, such as GM's Lordstown facility in Ohio.

The company has already stripped its nameplates off of the facility, after spending months shipping out dies, machinery, and parts. Inside the plant, there is almost nothing left, workers said.

Of the roughly 650 production workers at the plant, a few dozen have retired and over 300 have transferred to other plants. Two hundred production workers and 70 low-paid “temporary” workers have been laid off.

Workers who transferred to other plants received transfer bonuses of about \$30,000 (about \$16,000 after taxes), but those who have been laid off received nothing.

“Many of the people who were laid off were high-seniority,” said Jennifer. “Some of them simply couldn’t leave; whether it was because they had small children or other family commitments, but others simply didn’t get transfers.”

The closure of the plant comes within days of the announcement by American Axle and Manufacturing that it will close its Detroit plant in February 2012. The plant was the scene of a bitter three-month strike in 2008, which was isolated and betrayed by the UAW, again with the assistance of Wendy Thompson, the former local union president at the plant.

The experience in Indianapolis and American Axle highlights a basic fact: in the struggle between auto workers and the corporations and the government, the UAW is on the other side. The prerequisite of any genuine struggle is a break with this anti-working class organization and the development of an international and socialist strategy for the coming struggles of auto-workers.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact