

TRW workers speak out against proposed contract

A WSWS reporting team
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Workers on strike at the TRW automotive plant in Auburn, New York, spoke with the WSWS on the need for an eight-hour day, a raise, and their opposition to hiring temporary workers to be used and abused at the company's leisure. They also expressed their anger that the government is doing all it can to aid companies like TRW in exploiting their workforces.

Lynn Clark, a worker with 25 years at TRW, spoke extensively on the sacrifices already made by the workers: "During the last contract, in 2009, we gave up 23 percent of our wages and benefits, including dropping our pay from \$13.07 to \$12.13 an hour. We did this because the company claimed that they needed the extra cash to stay afloat. Where are we now? The CEO has made millions and given nothing back to the workers. They want to take more from us now!"

"They also want to change our hours from five eight-hour days to four 10-hour days, which is really hard on the older workers. We just can't work at that pace. The change also means that getting overtime is harder. The way the contract is set up, the only overtime we'd get would be if we worked more than 10 hours a day.

"Most of the workers here need that to make ends meet. There is a 65-year-old woman who works overtime here and at Wegman's part-time. That's just not right, especially if they change the hours on us. And TRW knows that we need overtime. Our base pay is not enough to pay for what we need to live, and they want to take even more from us."

Lynn also spoke on government collusion with the companies. "It's really the government's fault that this is allowed. They have rules on the books that they never enforce. They've given a bailout to all the companies and then turn the other way when employers

like TRW keep attacking the workers. It gives the companies all the rights. We have rights, too—to a job, decent wages and health care."

Leslie Kriegelstein and her friends Lori, Cheryl, and Deborah talked about how TRW is doing its best to break the strike. "TRW brought in about 60 nonunion people who are treated extremely well," she said. "The temps had catered meals brought in by the Next Generation food service. All the vending machines have been opened up for their use. We never had that kind of treatment. TRW is clearly trying to keep them there to break the strike.

"They've also brought in some very heavily armed security guards. For what? We've only ever had one security guard at the entrance just to make sure that nobody tries to sneak in. TRW wants everyone to think that we'd try and do something to the temps?—absolutely not. We just want what was promised to us in 2009, a raise back to where we were before the economy crashed."

Leslie added, "The company lied to us about needing money. We took a pay cut in 2009 because of the bad shape of the economy, but now that the company is making record profits, where are our bonuses?"

Wayne Kilmer, on the picket lines supporting his girlfriend with 32 years at TRW, gave a picture of how the company has treated its workers. "Workers are deeply disappointed with the company's treatment of long-time employees nearing retirement. Especially now, with the contract negotiations, because it is preventing a lot of people with over 30 years at TRW and eligible to retire from leaving with their pensions intact. The TRW executives have no respect for us. They take your life and give you back nothing."

Carolyn and Linda, two workers who joined us

during our talk with Wayne, agreed with his statements.

“We think that the company is making all these changes to force out older workers so they don’t have to pay them pensions,” Carolyn said.

“They also want to hire a lot of temp workers. Right now, the people inside are getting \$12 an hour. A new union worker would start at \$8.50 an hour and work his way up to \$12 an hour over three years. There isn’t a clearer way of TRW telling us what they think of how much a lot of us have put into this plant and to this company.

“The current contract states that we’d get a 50 cent pay raise and that’s it. That’s nothing compared to what we gave in 2009 and we’re not going to accept it. And, for the most part, it makes our lives harder because of the change in hours.”

Linda concluded, “Our demands are pretty simple: No temps, an eight-hour work day and a decent pay raise! That’s not all that much to ask, especially with how well TRW is doing right now.”



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