

Auburn, New York: 150 strike against TRW for eight-hour day

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One hundred fifty members of International Chemical Workers Union Local 192c have been on strike against the TRW automotive plant in Auburn, New York since May 7. The company is demanding that workers work 10- and 12-hour shifts and that they be allowed to hire temporary workers with lower wages and benefits.

The workers at TRW in Auburn are currently paid \$12.13 an hour, a near-poverty level wage for a family of four. The US Census Bureau's chronically underestimated poverty level for a family of four is \$23,050, which averages out to \$11.10 an hour. Many of the workers have sacrificed their time and supplemented their pay by working overtime and second jobs.

The prior contract, ratified three years ago in the midst of the economic crisis, negotiated nearly a dollar reduction in wages, a decrease in paid holidays and vacation days, and an increase in health insurance costs. TRW is now demanding that up to 20 percent of the workforce in Auburn be made up of temporary workers who will be paid less and have even fewer benefits. The company is also demanding that workers agree to be scheduled four 10-hour shifts a week or three 12-hours shifts.

TRW, based in Livonia, Michigan, makes tire pressure sensors and remote key door locks at the Auburn plant. The company is seeking to use the longer shifts and temporary workers to maintain production seven days a week while cutting down on overtime pay. Workers on the 12-hour shifts would only be paid 65 cents more per hour.

The company, which employs over 60,000 workers in 16 countries, had sales of over \$16 billion last year. According to *Forbes* magazine, the company's CEO

John C. Plant made \$41 million that included nearly \$28 million in stock gains alone in the last year. That is more than several times the pay of the entire plant's combined workforce.

Part of the reason TRW can make these demands is the current jobs market. The two neighboring counties—Oswego and Wayne—have unemployment figures for March of this year of 11.3 percent, the fourth highest in New York, and 9.3 percent, respectively. With relatively sparse opportunities for employment, companies have a large pool of jobless workers to choose from, and to hold over the heads of employed workers.

The union negotiating team announced a tentative agreement in Auburn on Wednesday, May 9. TRW had not conceded anything regarding the new work schedule. The company was hoping that the union leadership could sell the contract to its members. However, workers rejected the contract in a 128-11 vote.

TRW has also been encouraged in its attack on workers by the betrayal of the United Auto Workers, which has overseen the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs in auto and parts manufacturing and the cutting of wages to \$14 and \$15 an hour. TRW is seeking to set a new low bar by forcing workers to work longer hours for even less pay.

Auburn, a small city of some 28,000 residents, is located in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, lying between Rochester and Syracuse in Cayuga County. It is mainly a rural agricultural area with a population of around 80,000. The per capita income is only \$20,874. One in five Auburn resident lives below the poverty line, while the state rate is 14.2 percent. The major employers are the public sector, including education and government services. Aside from these, a

few manufacturing enterprises and the Auburn prison
comprise the base of economic life in the area.



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