

American GM worker supports German Opel workers

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In August 2010, workers at General Motors stamping plant in Indianapolis, Indiana rebelled against the efforts of the United Auto Workers to push through a 50 percent wage cut to entice a new owner to buy the plant, which was being shuttered by GM. With the support of the World Socialist Web Site, workers organized a rank-and-file committee independent of the UAW to oppose the wage cut and threatened factory closure.

The struggle of the Indianapolis rank-and-file committee won the sympathy of workers facing similar struggles and union betrayals throughout the US and different countries around the world. While workers defeated the wage-cutting demands, the factory was closed in June 2011 and workers were dispersed to other GM factories around the country.

The World Socialist Web Site spoke with one of the leaders of that fight, Jennifer, about the struggle of Opel workers in Germany. Opel workers are in a fight against the treachery of their own union, IG Metall, which has sanctioned the closing of the Bochum plant, wiping out 3,000 jobs. Last week UAW president Bob King, who sits on Opel's supervisory board along with IG Metall representatives, called for workers at Bochum to hold another vote on the contract pushed by the IGM, which workers overwhelmingly defeated in March.

WSWS: What do you have to say to the workers in Germany about the role of the UAW?

Jennifer: The only reason Bob King is in Germany is to force Opel workers to take what GM wants. Whatever deal he offers isn't going to benefit workers. The deal the UAW pushed in Spring Hill, Tennessee and Lake Orion to cut their wages in half showed what they had in mind in Indianapolis but we sent them packing.

No matter how the Bochum workers voted the UAW isn't going to back down. It's good that you are standing up just like we did in Indianapolis. The union thinks it can get whatever it wants and they are not going to let workers have any say. Bob King is trying to talk you into accepting a miserable deal by saying this is the best you are going to get. You shouldn't fall for it. They are planning to close the factory anyway, even if you take the cuts—that's why you should fight. Stand up and fight and show that there is another bunch of workers who are sick of it. Then more factories will do it too.

WSWS: Could you explain about your struggle in Indianapolis?

Jennifer: In 2010, Bob King sent the UAW International to our stamping plant in Indianapolis to tell us the only way the plant would stay open was with a new owner who would cut our wages by 50 percent. The union had already accepted new hires making less and a whole category of "flex-temps," who were working 40 hours with no benefits. If you complained, the UAW talked to you like an idiot and told us we were lucky to have a job.

The UAW said a new owner, JD Norman, would take over the plant but we would work under his wages and rules, with GM still controlling it. They came out with a contract that would cut our wages in half, from \$28 to \$14 an hour. The senior workers, we told the truth to the new hires—many who wanted to accept the contract. In the end, we said, they would be working for \$9 an hour and the plant wouldn't stay open anyway. We told them, once they got the wages down for a major stamping plant those wages would spread throughout the industry.

We had voted against any negotiations with JD Norman but the UAW held talks behind our backs.

They even brought the owner into the plant and gave him our home addresses so he could mail us things to try to convince us to take his offer. The UAW International said this was the best deal we were going to get—so take it. In August 2010, we held a local union meeting where workers hollered at the UAW International representatives, telling them to get out because we weren't going to take their deal. Everyone knew that the UAW was in the pockets of GM.

WSWS: What lessons did you learn about the international character of the class struggle?

Jennifer: In the US, they have sought to wear us down. But through the *World Socialist Web Site* and the international support the Indianapolis Rank-and-File Committee received we came to realize that it is not just workers in the US who are facing this. GM, the UAW and the other unions are doing it all over the world, in Germany and everywhere. For GM and the UAW, they are going from country to country lowering the price of labor and hoping to make a car for virtually nothing, so they can pour more money into CEOs and other rich people.

I used to be a “Buy American” kind of worker but I learned through our struggle. GM and other corporations are in the US, in Canada, in Europe and they are making the same cars and products. If all workers in all countries stood up and fought together GM and the UAW could not isolate us and keep us from knowing what is happening. Many workers are asking what good is it paying union dues if they don't do anything for us? That is why we formed our committee.



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