

Indiana autoworkers welcome WSWS campaign team

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Teams from the *World Socialist Web Site* opened a campaign to speak with autoworkers in central Indiana with visits yesterday to the Fiat Chrysler transmission plant in Kokomo and the General Motors stamping center in Marion.

Kokomo and Marion are towns of 60,000 and 30,000 each and are located on the plains of the American Midwest. The cities form part of a chain of mid-sized industrial cities within a 60-mile radius of the state capital of Indianapolis, which have historically played a central role in the auto industry and the early class battles by autoworkers.

Over the last three-and-a-half decades, the two cities, along with Muncie, Anderson, New Castle and other nearby towns, have been devastated by plant closures and downsizing.

Workers at both sites were broadly supportive of WSWS campaigners and greeted the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter with enthusiasm. Some in the plants had already read and signed up for its online version.

Workers in particular responded to the insistence of campaigners that they had the right to know the content of the negotiations between the UAW and the auto companies, which reportedly involves sweeping cuts in health care and the continued suppression of workers' wage demands. It became clear in conversations that there exists broad support for a rebellion against the UAW and a real fight against the auto companies.

"The UAW is more of a company union," said Chris. "There are people that are put out of here for no reason. I was put out for ten weeks without pay for a medical reason. No back pay, no sick leave. I lost my house and I'm behind on my car payments. It's killing me."

"It's about time to fight back and the union is just for the company. We're paying our dues for the company

to screw us. The only time the union does anything is when they can get more dues money out of people. That needs to stop. The union people aren't working on the Alternative Work Schedule [AWS, which subjects workers to 10-hour days, weekend and swing shift work]. You can only be sick for three days a year! What if you have allergies? The average person is sick more than three days a year, but they cut it down from eight."

Another worker told the WSWS, "Where'd our strike fund go if we're not going to strike and how come dues were raised?"

"I don't think the union will fight for us. That fish stinks from head to tail. Everybody's wondering what's in the negotiations, and why does the contract change every few days with the alternative work schedule? What happened to time-and-a-half on Sundays? I work days on Friday and Saturday and nights on Sunday and Monday. I work 52 weekends a year. Hell, I even work on holidays. And the union—it's just like the government—they're a bunch of crooks."

Responding to the call by campaigners for workers to build rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the struggle out the hands of the UAW, he said, "I agree with that. If it does anything, the union will call a strike for something like four hours. The last time I was on strike was for just seven hours in 2007."

Sarah, a 23-year-old second generation autoworker whose father has 27 years experience, said, "The union doesn't tell us a damn thing. They don't want us to know what they're getting us into."

Sarah is not impressed by the Obama administration: "In 2008, 'hope' was everywhere, but he really just wanted to stick it to us."

Jim, a third generation autoworker with 19 years, said that the "job security" preached by the union is "a

failure at all levels, the company, the UAW, the government.” The truth of this is seen in the closed factories and poverty in Kokomo and other cities.

Workers at GM’s metal stamping plant in Marion also gave a warm reception to the WSWS campaign team. The 1,600 workers at the Marion Metal Center produce panels, stampings and other parts for truck assembly plants in Indiana, Michigan, Texas, Kansas and other states.

The factory is one of only three standalone metal stamping plants—the others in Flint, Michigan and Parma, Ohio—still operated by GM in the US. In 2011, GM shut the nearby Indianapolis stamping plant—wiping out 650 jobs—after workers rebelled against demands by the corporation and the UAW that they accept a 50 percent wage cut to attract a new owner to buy the plant. There was widespread support at the Marion plant for the struggle of the Indianapolis workers.

Last year, James L. Gibson, a 48-year-old worker for Quaker Chemical, which is contracted by GM to handle metal-processing chemicals, was killed in a chemical explosion in the plant that also injured several others. Many workers expressed disbelief and anger that GM had restored production so quickly after the fatal accident on July 2, 2014. At the time, a GM Marion worker told the WSWS, “GM is alright with safety as long as it doesn’t interfere with sending parts out the door.”

The warm response of GM workers to the WSWS campaigners contrasted sharply with hostility of local UAW officials. After most of the afternoon shift had left the parking lot, GM Unit Shop Chair Randy Christopher, an executive board member from UAW Local 977, ordered campaigners to leave, shouted obscenities and threatened the team. When they told Christopher they were not looking for a fight, he replied provocatively, “Well, I am.” As they drove away, Christopher kicked their car and took photos of their license plate.

Such thuggish behavior is an indication of the desperation of the UAW. Widely despised by the rank-and-file, union officials fear the anger of workers will develop into a conscious political opposition to their collaboration with the corporations and the government.



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