

“Conditions are verging on an explosion”

Bowling Green, Kentucky autoworker speaks out

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A worker at the Bowling Green Assembly in Kentucky, a General Motors facility where the Corvette is manufactured, recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about worsening conditions facing workers inside the plant.

“It’s a horrible plant,” she said. “The union is really weak. We face constant harassment. All kinds of stuff goes on. They don’t honor contracts.

“If you report something, the union will come out, say they’ll investigate, and then they don’t come back. You have to keep calling them.” After reporting a violation on the part of a supervisor who was working on the line, she said, “I’ve been getting written up for this and that ever since.”

Like GM and Ford autoworkers across the country, the worker said she has been following the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) workers’ votes closely. She has been reading the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter and the comments of voting workers on social media. “I’m voting ‘no’ on the contract,” she said. “I’m hoping the trend of the Chrysler workers voting it down continues.”

She lives in Nashville, Tennessee, but makes a grueling two-hour commute each way to Bowling Green and back every day.

“I’ve been in Bowling Green for a year,” she said. “I’ve been trying to get into the Spring Hill plant,” a GM facility where her husband works. “But they won’t allow traditional [tier 1] workers to get in there. They take people off the street locally so they can pay them less.

“There are probably 300 people or more that are actually from the Nashville area who drive back and forth to Kentucky. It’s 101 miles, so we leave out at 4

o’clock in the morning, because the shift starts at 6:12 a.m.

“This leaves no time to do anything else. We work 10-hour days, and get home at 6:30 in the evening.” She has worked for GM for 21 years, and has been shifted around from plants in Michigan, Georgia, Ohio and then Kentucky.

The impoverishment of large sections of the working class has created a desperate job situation and put pressure on relatively better-paid workers across all industries in the US, but perhaps nowhere is this pressure more intense than in manufacturing.

The introduction of the tiered wage system in the auto industry has aggravated these conditions, with older, better-paid workers targeted as a “dying class,” in the words of FCA head Sergio Marchionne.

This antagonism is further sharpened in southern auto plants by the heavy reliance upon temping agencies. In 2012, when the Bowling Green plant announced that 170 temp workers would be brought in for producing the C7 Corvette, 550 applications flooded in within hours. Those positions were slated to last between four and 18 months. Instead, many temp workers are employed indefinitely, with benefits and job security dangled in front of them.

“I’ve been in this industry for 21 years. I’ve never seen the culture the way it is today,” the worker said. “We work alongside long-time temp workers, who’ve been working on temp contracts for two years at least.

“They are coming from McDonald’s, making \$8 an hour, and starting at \$14 here. That seems like a lot of money to them.” She said the level of impoverishment made it difficult to speak to the lower-paid workers about the fraudulent wage increase held out by the

UAW, which would be virtually eaten by inflation.

“They hear over eight years they’ll be making \$25 an hour. They don’t understand it. You get backlash when you try to explain it.”

“They’re hoping they get hired and they don’t know,” she said of the temporary workforce. “It’s supposed to be 90-days temp and then permanent hire. But you’ve got people who are willing to do anything and everything for a job.

“Everyone is scared, the newer and the older workers. The conditions are verging on an explosion.”

“I want to organize something,” she said, responding to the call of the Socialist Equality Party to organize action committees in the auto plants that are independent of the UAW. “I’m reaching, I’m searching, and I’m tired. It’s not fair to treat us this way.”



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