

GM-Opel workers in Germany support struggle of US autoworkers

Our reporters
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The struggle of US Fiat-Chrysler workers is winning significant support from GM-Opel workers in Germany. WSWs reporters spoke with workers in front of the factory gates in Rüsselsheim. Many had read material distributed prior to the early shift, and remained after their shift to declare their solidarity with their American brothers and sisters.

Workers in Rüsselsheim spoke out in favour of the rebellion by US autoworkers against the UAW and the widespread opposition to a contract containing numerous attacks, including the expansion of unequal pay for the same work: the two-tier wage system.

“Equal pay for the same work” is also a major issue at Rüsselsheim. Several workers report that in GM-Opel’s main plant, a variety of labour practices have existed for years, with employees working side by side on the conveyor belt paid entirely different wages.

Albert said, “I hope very much that these workers in America win. In the article, it states that the young workers have to start at much lower wages because the UAW accepts two-tier wages in the plants. That is all for nothing. I hope very much that these workers can resist the attacks.”

“But we know all of this from here at Opel,” he continued. “That is our system with the contract workers. Such things are amoral. I work as a contract fitter, and as such you always live in uncertainty. Because the company has a monopoly here, nobody looks at what someone can achieve, from the outset they take fitters from outsourcing firms.”

Albert explained that on Friday, October 9, the issue of the minimum wage had come up at a factory meeting. They were about to do away with or weaken the minimum wage in relation to the hiring of refugees. “This is just a pretext, something like this cannot be tolerated!” he said. “There is enough work, and the

companies and management always get richer. This is an absolute disgrace.”

Jacques, a production worker, said, “It is well known that the American auto plants are run by a mafia, and that they have the trade unions in their pockets. But it isn’t much different here. I don’t even want to talk about final assembly, terrible conditions dominate there. Pressure has been increased since Opel’s Bochum plant was shut down. Things can rapidly change here: at times we work incredibly hard, then we are on reduced hours.”

An older worker said, “I would like to declare my solidarity with workers in America. It is worthwhile to struggle for one’s rights. Here, in my opinion, things have gotten a bit better since over a hundred short-term contract workers were hired or their wages adjusted. But it’s true that plants in Bochum and Antwerp were shut down. And the job contract firms still exist here in Rüsselsheim.”

Patrick, a contract worker who was recently taken on by Opel, reported what the hiring of contract workers by the main company meant. “I have been here in the plant for two years. I worked for two years as a contract worker, and now finally I have obtained a permanent contract. But I still don’t have the same conditions as permanent employees. Now I have to begin on the lowest wage, so I now earn less than I did before, even though I do the same work.” On the struggle at FCA, Patrick said, “Equal pay for the same work—it would be good if things were like that. I hope that the American workers achieve that.”

Frank said, “The rebellion by our colleagues in the US is correct.” He explained, “Here in Rüsselsheim, we have given up on Christmas bonuses and holiday pay for years to save the company, as we were told. Our contractual pay increases are always put off until

the next round. We will supposedly get this money back, when the firm makes profits. But at the moment we are working reduced hours because the vehicles we make in Rüsselsheim, the Zafira and Insignia, are older models and are no longer in such high demand on the market.”

Amed stated his support for the struggle at FCA, saying, “I think it’s great that workers there are fighting for truth and equal treatment. The trade unions always act as if they defend the workers, but that isn’t the reality. They cooperate closely with senior management. It’s obvious that there is no progress, things are getting worse rather than better, all of that is just for show.”

Ahmed agreed with the idea that workers should mount a joint international struggle against the corporations. “Yes, that’s absolutely right. Our conditions are the same, whether you work here, in Spain, Rostock or the US. Everyone should have the same rights. We will only achieve something if we all fight together.”

Elleni has worked for many years in the plant. She read the report about the fight at FCA and said, “I think it’s good that these workers are fighting against injustice. Everyone should have the same rights. I have been here for a long time. When I started, in the 1980s, you could reach a higher pay grade within six weeks, and then it continued step by step higher, and you had bonuses on top of that. But what do they get today? For a long time, I have only received 50 percent of my Christmas bonus.”

Elleni comes from Greece. “I like it that you write about such things. The media is very biased. It was very bad how the media spoke so horribly about Greece over the summer. They have provoked real hatred towards Greece with their agitation. Why don’t they just say that the banks are responsible? Why is it always ‘the Greeks’?”



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