

# Letter from Ohio GM worker on UAW betrayal of Kmart struggle

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*The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter received the following letter from a worker at the General Motors Lordstown Assembly plant about the struggle of Kmart distribution center workers in nearby Warren, Ohio. Also members of the United Auto Workers (UAW), the Kmart workers have suffered a two-decade decline in the real pay and benefits overseen by the UAW. In recent days, the Kmart workers have twice voted down a sellout contract, which the UAW is still trying to push through.*

With everything going on with the Big Three and autoworkers, it is easy to overlook a real stand being taken by the members of UAW 1112 at the Kmart distribution center in Warren, Ohio.

This struggle started long ago, and most of the employees have almost 30 years in. The workers were stripped of all of their retirement during Kmart's bankruptcy. When the company bought back their stocks at a penny on the dollar, workers were offered to buy it back at nearly 50 cents on the dollar.

Since being put in the UAW, these Kmart workers have suffered huge health care cuts and zero raises. In fact, most employees earned less in the first two contracts than they did before because of union dues. It's been cut after cut after cut, and these workers are sick of hearing the "broke company" speech.

Most of these men and women have been bleeding worst when the company shifts the profits it makes from selling their most profitable stores into bonuses for the top CEOs. This exposes the claim the Kmart chain is making no money. Most employees are being forced to work Sunday for straight time. This happens because they are sent home early on Friday so they collect no overtime for work on a Sunday! In all honesty, those may be the lucky ones, the ones that are not forced to work 10-12 hours a day, because they cannot keep "new hires," even the ones through temp

agencies because they top out at \$11 an hour.

Most employees used to say it was an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, but because of the "quota" of each employee, many are facing termination. The union agreed to these speed-ups by the company. This type of work is not easy, and most of these men would have been retired if they had not been stripped of everything they had saved with their company match.

Many of these good hard-working men have voted NO, now twice on a contract that has their health care cut by 10 percent again and with many other concessions. The union was nice enough to offer a 75-cent raise up front with 30 cents disappearing after three years.

Kmart has adjusted all of the distribution centers' contract expiration—of course with union connivance—so all of the overworked union members cannot stand together. The only leverage this plant has is the Christmas season, which starts in September at distribution centers.

If the new contract is ratified, it will be a three-year and six-month contract, which takes what little leverage they have away. Kmart workers must insist that all contracts expire at the same time, no matter what union represents them. It's not about the struggle of each center, or the auto industry. It's about the common struggle we each share. The middle class is becoming the working poor. Saying enough is enough.



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