

UAW sanctions closure of GM assembly plant in Wisconsin

George Gallanis
4 November 2015

The tentative contract agreement between General Motors (GM) and United Auto Workers (UAW) sanctions the permanent closure of the GM Janesville plant in Wisconsin. The shutdown of the 4.8 million-square-foot plant, which has been on “standby” since 2009, exposes the lie that the UAW won “job security” in the deal.

The nearly 100-year-old plant, 100 miles northwest of Chicago, ceased production of SUVs on December 23, 2008, with more than 2,000 workers losing their jobs just days before Christmas. Around 60 workers continued assembly production under the GM/Isuzu light truck partnership until April 23, 2009. Roughly 50 skilled trade workers went on to decommission the plant.

The forced bankruptcy and restructuring of GM, overseen by the Obama administration, led to the closure of 14 plants, and the elimination of 20,000 jobs. Several plants, including Janesville; Spring Hill, Tennessee; and Orion Township, north of Detroit, were put on “standby.” Both Spring Hill and Orion were subsequently reopened after the UAW “modified” the national agreement and the local union agreed to impose even deeper concessions on workers in those plants.

Prior to being decommissioned and placed on standby, the Janesville plant produced large SUVs, such as the Chevy Suburban and Tahoe and the GMC Yukon and Yukon XL. The highly profitable models are now made at GM’s Arlington, Texas, plant. The UAW has long encouraged a fratricidal competition between plants to land new products.

The Janesville plant employed about 7,000 workers in the 1970s before it saw thousands of jobs slashed. Its closure was a death sentence for nearby supply companies that provided parts for the plant.

Approximately 1,150 supplier jobs were lost in Janesville.

The local economy has been devastated, forcing hundreds of workers to relocate to different GM factories across the country. This meant uprooting their families and leaving their homes, with others having to drive hundreds of miles to other factories.

Commenting on the Facebook page “Reopen the General Motors Janesville Assembly Plant,” a local resident said, “I would be crazy with excitement if it was to open again. Janesville has taken a big hit when it closed. I love Janesville and its people.”

Another person commented, “Yes, they need to do the right thing and open the plant back

so the good people can come and don’t have to drive thousands of miles to work. And won’t have half the danger of getting killed. Because of being too tired to drive home to be with their family.”

Responding to the announcement of the closure, Tim Silha, president of UAW Local 95 in Janesville, said: “It is with deep regret that we need to announce that the national parties have agreed to the shuttering of the local GM plant in Janesville, as part of the newly negotiated tentative national contract. Despite all our best efforts, the leadership fell short of our quest to reactivate the facility.”

While defending the union’s efforts to underbid workers at other factories, Silha predictably blamed the closure on the Republican Party. “Recent legislation passed by the Wisconsin Republican controlled legislature, such as Right to Work and Act 10, were the straws that broke the camel’s back. Despite all the lobbying efforts Local 95 did to curb such laws our voice fell on deaf ears, as the votes went right down party lines. We wish to thank our Democratic lawmakers for all their support through these legislative

battles.”

Watch David North’s remarks commemorating 25 years of the *World Socialist Web Site* and donate today.

In fact, it was the Democratic Party—in particular the Obama administration—that ordered the closing of the Janesville plant in the first place! The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are the tools of the big corporations and Wall Street. The multimillionaire financiers Obama put in charge of restructuring GM wiped out thousands of jobs, expanded the hated two-tier wage and benefit system, froze the wages of tradition workers and abolished the eight-hour day.

Having extracted billions in profits from the backs of workers, GM this year alone has doled out \$10 billion to its wealthiest investors through stock buybacks and dividend payments. The UAW praises the Democrats because in exchange for selling out GM workers, the UAW-controlled retiree medical trust was handed billions of dollars in GM stock.

In addition to shutting the Janesville plant, the new contract commits the UAW to collaborate in the further destruction of jobs. Despite the lies about “creating or saving 3,300” jobs, there are several factories, including the Marion Metal Center in Indiana, that have no product commitments, meaning they are likely to be closed. As for creating “job opportunities,” this means the UAW will do everything to slash labor costs in order to induce GM to “in-source” jobs from low-cost suppliers or from the company’s operations in Mexico, China and other low-wage countries.

The UAW is opposed to any genuine struggle to defend jobs because it would disrupt its “partnership” with the corporation. That is why rank-and-file workers must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW in order to mobilize the full strength of all autoworkers in the US and internationally against the whipsawing by the global auto giants.

On December 24th, 2008, just one day after most production was shuttered at the GM Janesville Assembly Plant, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: “Once again, the UAW is collaborating with the government and the auto bosses to blackmail workers into accepting a historic rollback in wages, living standards and working conditions as part of the auto industry bailout. The concessions wrenched from workers will not be used to ensure the long-term health of the industry and the jobs of autoworkers, but to

provide lucrative returns for the corporate executives and biggest investors.

“Autoworkers should reject the demand for concessions and organize a struggle, independently of the UAW, based on a new strategy. This means breaking with the two parties of big business and advancing a socialist solution to the economic crisis, including the nationalization of the auto industry under the democratic control of working people.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact