

“We don’t blame Mexico, we blame the company”

Workers denounce layoffs at Indianapolis Carrier plant

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Last Thursday, 338 workers completed their final shifts at the Carrier gas furnace factory in Indianapolis, Indiana. They were the first wave of 640 workers who will lose their jobs by December 22 at the plant, which President Trump claimed he “saved” through negotiations with Carrier’s parent company, United Technologies (UTC).

"People knew Trump was full of crap," 13-year Carrier veteran Taj Longino told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "But they hung on to the hope because most were too young to retire or too old to get another job. Where are they going to go now? They’re stuck in limbo and uncertainty," Longino said.

The fan coil department is being shut down and moved to Mexico, the worker said. “Counting the maintenance department, press operators, forklift drivers and production line workers, maybe there will be 600 workers left, out of way more than 1,000. The other Carrier plant in northern Indiana is gone.”

Brenda Darlene Battle, another former Carrier worker, recounted to the *New Yorker* that, like Longino, she did not expect Trump to follow through on his promises, stating that she felt Trump and the CEO of Carrier were "in bed together the whole time." She recalls in her account how, just the day before the layoffs, managers discussed cutting a three-man blower-shelf crew down to two men, which would be almost impossible, not to mention unsafe. She points out that summer is peak production season for the plant; workers had been working six and seven days a week to make production before the company abruptly announced its layoff and closure plans.

The fate of the Carrier workers was exploited by both Trump and then-Democratic primary candidate Bernie

Sanders after UTC announced plans to shut the plant and move production to Monterrey, Mexico where workers are paid \$3.90 an hour. Both sought to divert anger away from the corporations and their relentless drive for profit by blaming “unfair trade” and Mexican workers for the loss of jobs.

Just ahead of his inauguration, Trump triumphantly announced that a deal had been reached with UTC that would keep the Carrier plant in Indianapolis running and save 1,100 jobs. He and Vice President Pence—the former governor of Indiana—celebrated the deal with United Steelworkers representatives at the plant on December 1. The agreement promised UTC incentives from both the federal and state governments of up to \$7 million in exchange for UTC's promise to employ at least 1,069 people at the Indianapolis plant for 10 years. Additionally, the company promised to invest \$16 million in the facility.

The deal did not represent a victory, Pyrrhic or otherwise, for Carrier workers, though. Only 730 of the 1,069 jobs that UTC vowed to maintain are in manufacture. The remainder are engineering and technical positions, which had never been slated for outsourcing in the first place. Moreover, the \$16 million in plant expenditures would not go towards increasing the workforce of the Indianapolis plant. Greg Hayes, UTC's CEO, stated publicly in December that the money had been earmarked for increasing automation at the plant, flatly stating that this would result in fewer workers over time.

True to form, the USW went along with this ruse and did everything to block any resistance by workers at the plant and more broadly against the relentless attack on workers’ jobs and living standards by the global

corporations and both big-business parties. Although Chuck Jones, president of USW local 1999, stated, as details of the deal made their way to the public, that Trump had "lied his ass off," subsequent statements by USW President Leo Gerard revealed the nationalistic, anti-worker role played by the USW. He pledged to work with the Trump administration in the future to keep American manufacturers from moving operations offshore.

Gerard boasted of the despicable concessions the union had handed the UTC at the expense of workers' safety, benefits, and job security, recounting how the union "offered Carrier what would it take to keep you there." He complained that American workers could not "work low enough in wages and benefits to maintain jobs against Mexican workers, against Chinese workers, against Bangladeshi workers or Vietnamese workers."

In fact, the USW and other unions have spent decades lowering the wages of US workers. The USW accepted concessions that included a 3-tier wage scale, with new employees making a poverty wage of \$14 an hour in a plant where they are exposed to carcinogens and other unsafe conditions.

The Trump administration, the Democrats and the unions have sought to drive a wedge between US and Mexican workers and prevent a common struggle in defense of jobs and living standards. Among workers, however, there is a growing recognition that the enemy is at home.

"Nobody blames the Mexican workers for this," Longino told the WSWS. "Mexico didn't cut these jobs, the company did. The Steelworkers didn't do enough to keep this from happening. Carrier got away with moving our jobs and giving us next to nothing without any big fight."

"For years, we heard whispers they were going to move and we were just waiting to see when they would pull off this stunt," the veteran Carrier worker said. Nevertheless, the company's announcement in May caught workers off guard. "We were in shock when they randomly shut production, called us in for a meeting and without any warning told us the plant would close," Longino says.

"I took the buyout," he says, "because I was ready to move on. They gave us a \$2,500 signing bonus, plus one week's pay for every year you worked here. You

get six months of health insurance and then they cut you off. The deal was horrible but I wanted to look after my health. That place was a blessing and a curse. It raised our kids and helped put them through school. At the same time, it tore us down and all the fumes, lead and insulation material got into our bodies."

The continued onslaught on jobs exposes the bogus character of Trump's "Make America Great Again" economic nationalism, which is being used as a cover to eliminate job safety and environmental regulations, slash corporate tax breaks so low that corporations, as the billionaire president told the UTC CEO, "would be able to print their own money."

The more the corporate-government war against the working class escalates, the more the USW and other unions beat the drums for trade war and militarism. The same day Carrier was announcing its layoffs, the President of the United Auto Workers union was holding a press conference in Detroit announcing that the UAW would soon launch its "Buy American" campaign, even as the UAW colludes with the auto companies to slash jobs and expand the number of temporary workers.

These conditions are driving the working class into struggle against the corporate and financial elite, both big-business parties and their stooges in the pro-company unions. "Indianapolis is a manufacturing city," Longino said. "When you take away all the factory jobs there is nothing to replace them. People were making \$20-\$30 an hour at GM and other places. Now those jobs are gone and the housing market is down, the schools are going down. People in Indianapolis and all over are going to have to wake up. I think it's just a matter of time but a revolution is coming."



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