

“We are being called to action by our brothers and sisters around the world to join this fight”

Autoworkers call for support for February 9 march against GM plant closings

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Support is growing for the February 9 demonstration at the General Motors headquarters in Detroit to fight the company’s plans to shut five factories in the United States and Canada and eliminate nearly 15,000 production and salary workers’ jobs. The demonstration has been called by the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

The call for the demonstration has been greeted by workers at the factory gates, young people in the communities, and on social media. Campaign teams distributed thousands of fliers for the demonstration at auto factories, including GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler plants in Detroit and Toledo, Ohio, and at the North American International Auto Show in downtown Detroit. Workers and students are also posting notifications of the demonstration on social media.

“I will be there on February 9,” a Ford worker at the Dearborn Assembly Plant said. “We are going to bring a contingent of workers to the protest. We can’t rely on the UAW because they are scamming us. We couldn’t find anyone at my plant who voted for the contract the union said was passed.” He added, “Workers have to unite in every country of the world. The companies are united around the world against us, so we have to unite too.”

Despite the freezing weather, a campaign team on Monday handed out 250 copies of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to GM workers leaving work at the Oshawa Assembly plant, near Toronto, Ontario. Workers at the plant have conducted strikes and protests against GM’s plan to close the giant complex,

which once employed over 20,000 workers.

The newsletter contained information about the wildcat strikes by Mexican auto parts workers in the border town of Matamoros, which has led to a slowdown in production at several Ford and GM factories in North America. The February 9 demonstration is calling for the unity of US, Canadian and Mexican workers to fight for the right to a secure and good-paying jobs for all workers. This is in opposition to the anti-Mexican campaign by the Unifor union in Canada and the UAW in the US.

Several Oshawa workers indicated that they regularly read and appreciated the *Autoworker Newsletter*. They said they did not agree with the call by Unifor to boycott cars assembled in Mexico and believed workers should unite across North America.

An email to the newsletter from a Lear Seating parts worker in Ajax, Ontario, said, “I am with you to the end in your fight with GM and the other auto giants.” In a message to the striking Matamoros workers, he said, “I want to let you know everyone at this factory is all behind you.” The worker concluded by expressing his solidarity those planning to attend the coming demonstration, saying “Good luck in Detroit.”

The strike in Matamoros and opposition by autoworkers in the US and Canada to the threatened shutdowns is part of a growing international movement against the restructuring of the global industry. Shortly after GM made its November 26 plant closings announcement, financial analysts said Ford would cut up to 25,000 jobs mostly in Europe. The company, which made \$3.7 billion in profits last year, is

threatening to close or sharply reduce employment at plants in Germany, France, England and Russia, while it looks to integrate its operations with Volkswagen, the world's largest automaker.

Fearing opposition from workers, Joe Hinrichs, the executive vice president and president of the Americas for Ford Motor Company, said Friday that the company has not revealed the details of its \$11 billion restructuring plan because it first wants to communicate its strategy with "key stakeholders," including the unions.

Ford workers at the Taubaté plant in Brazil walked out January 22 after the company tried to lay off 12 workers in preparation of far larger job cuts. In opposition to the union, workers called a mass assembly and voted to shut down production at the engine and transmission plant, which is 80 miles northeast of Sao Paulo and employs 1,300 workers.

The company rescinded the layoffs two days later.

Workers fighting layoffs have also occupied a steel plant in Argentina owned by Ternium, which supplies steel for auto and other industries in Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, and has plants in North America, including one in Louisiana.

More than 13,000 Audi workers in Hungary have also struck to demand higher wages and time off on the weekend, in the latest walkout in the Eastern Europe, which has long been considered Germany's "Mexico" where VW, Mercedes Benz and other companies can exploit workers with low wages and sweatshop conditions.

Frightened by the prospect that US workers would also rebel against the unions and unite with workers south of the border against the auto companies, the UAW, like Unifor, has helped enforce the news blackout on the Matamoros strike. After a campaign team distributed newsletters to workers at Fiat Chrysler's Jeep Assembly Plant in Toledo, Ohio informing them about the struggle in Mexico, a Jeep worker wrote a letter to the *Toledo Blade* complaining about the silence of the media.

"So, I'm curious why when there is a major labor strike in Matamoros, Mexico that is shutting down U.S. auto plants due to parts shortages that virtually nobody is covering this story," he wrote. "There may be as many as 70,000 people on strike there, but not a blip on the news about it."

A part-time temporary worker at the Jeep plant wrote in to the *Autoworker Newsletter* saying, "Please tell our brothers and sisters in Mexico, how very proud [we are] of them. They are true heroes! I wish I could have met them at the border to join their demonstration. We are with them in spirit and hope they remain strong! Gracias!"

Another Jeep worker emailed the *Autoworker Newsletter* to express support for the February 9 demonstration. "It's time for workers to unite against companies such as GM which have grown too big to treat its labor force with dignity, and too concerned with the shareholder profits to provide stability to its workforce. If you want to make a difference, the rally being held on February 9th is a good place to start."

The part-time worker added, "Collective bargaining is supposed to ensure dignity as well as fair compensation. Unfortunately, our unions have sold us out and are merely talking heads for the companies.

"Not only has this effected the unionized laborers, who have lost wages and benefits routinely over the last few contracts, but it has, of course, trickled down to those who are not unionized. We have not had an increase in the minimum wage in over a decade in the US. The average American lives paycheck to paycheck, and many workers have multiple jobs just to stay afloat. This includes most temporary workers in the auto industry.

"Laborers are currently fighting this global issue in countries like Mexico, France and Hungary. It is time for the American worker to stand up and join them in solidarity. We have rested on our laurels for far too long, failing ourselves and the rest of the world.

"We are being called to action by our brothers and sisters around the world to join this fight. I would encourage anyone who cares about these issues to join the February 9th demonstration in Detroit. It's a good first step in restoring the means of production back to the laborer. It has to start somewhere, and it starts with you."



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