

“We need to understand we all face the same struggle”

Broad support for February 9 demonstration against GM plant closings

Our reporters
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On February 9 at 2 p.m. EST, the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is co-hosting a demonstration in Detroit to fight plant closings, mass layoffs and concessions. For more information about attending the demonstration, go to wsws.org/auto.

The World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter has received many statements of support in the last few days for the Saturday, February 9 demonstration in Detroit called by the Autoworker Newsletter and the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees. The demonstration is aimed at mobilizing opposition to the plans by General Motors to close five plants in the US and Canada, including major assembly plants in Detroit, Michigan, Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario, and the elimination of the jobs of more than 14,000 production and salaried workers.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Unifor union in Canada have opposed any industrial action to fight the plant closings and mass layoffs. Instead, the unions have ramped up their anti-Mexican nationalism in an effort to prevent a unified struggle between autoworkers in the US and Canada and their brothers in Mexico who have been waging a determined battle against poverty wages paid by multinational auto parts producers in Matamoros.

The demonstration is fighting for the formation of rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, independently of the UAW and Unifor, to unite autoworkers in the US, Canada and Mexico, along with other sections of the working class to fight the attack on jobs by GM and other global automakers.

The urgency of the demonstration is underscored by the start of the jobs massacre today with 4,250 engineers, IT workers, marketing employees and other salaried workers being marched out of the GM Tech Center in Warren, Michigan and other locations. “I will be trembling at my desk, just waiting for HR or my director to say: ‘I’m sorry sir, it’s time for you to leave,’” one global marketing worker wrote on the web blog thelayoff.com last night.

The job cuts come in advance of the company’s 2018 report due out Wednesday that is expected to show a decline in profits from the \$11.9 billion the company made in 2017. The aim is to

reassure Wall Street investors that the company is stepping up attacks on its workforce in order to drive up its earnings in 2019.

Marlene, who works at the GM Detroit-Hamtramck plant, expressed her support for the February 9 demonstration. “It’s time that the working man links arms across the country in any field of employment. We have to stand up together. I want to be part of this and would take pride in such a movement.

“I lose my job June 1 and they are working us 11-hour shifts, rushing us out of a job. The union has been locked into a complete conflict of interest. How can they possibly represent us when they took GM stock? They have turned their backs on us. It’s a slap in the face to workers. It’s just greed.

“I grew up in the Poletown neighborhood and worked at St. Joseph’s Hospital. All that was destroyed for GM to build this plant, and now they are shutting it down. I understand technology and autonomous vehicles, but you can’t let technology take over the workers. This plant closing affects peoples’ lives, families are being torn apart, marriages suffer. Closing plants means destroying families. It is just unfair.

“Now the company wants me to travel across the county to another plant. In a year or two that will be shut down too. I’m all for rank-and-file committees. I’m for them to represent my coworkers, their families and myself. We need a strong foundation of unity.”

Kathy, a General Motors contract worker, said she was planning to attend Saturday’s demonstration. “I see it as encouraging for workers. This is something that people have been looking for and have not been getting from the union. They are not for the workers, they are for the company.

“We need to encourage the teachers, the Amazon workers, the UPS workers to join us in a struggle. We have to join together as the working class and fight for our rights. We need to understand that we all face the same struggle. We need to stand together with one another.

“The Fedex workers, the UPS workers and the Lear workers all got contracts rammed down their throats by the union.”

She said US autoworkers should take a lead from workers in Mexico. “They told the union we don’t need you. That was a

shining example. They got what they wanted because they wouldn't settle. We need to take that next step ourselves.

"We can't let them run over us like they did for the last 50 years. They are saying to workers 'hit the road,' the same workers that built the company.

"No matter what happens, we need to continue the struggle for ourselves and future generations."

A veteran worker at Fiat Chrysler's Warren Stamping plant, said, "We need to come together because if we don't the corporations are going to keep taking away from us. They don't want workers to make decent wages or to have enough for a nice home and to be able to raise a family.

"I have family and friends at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant. They're forcing workers to move to Flint or to Texas to keep their jobs, while the companies are using temps seven days a week, 10 hours a day. The corporations want to push out the full-time, higher-paid workers, and they are almost there, and have the whole workforce be part-time, temporary workers.

"People are tired of all the layoffs and plant closings. GM and Ford are closing plants and at Chrysler some workers are facing eight- to ten-week layoffs. There is even talk that Warren Truck could be down for five months.

"The young workers in the plant are not guaranteed anything. No one should have to live like that, not knowing if you'll be working or not, and afraid to take a day off. It's just too much stress. I've heard about young mothers dropping their babies off anywhere just to come to work and keep a job. You're forced to work every day. It's a lose-lose situation.

"As long as they keep us divided, they are going to keep taking away. The union is just as guilty as the people that own Chrysler, Ford and GM. They're not for us. The UAW does whatever the bosses say. As long as the union officials have their big houses, they don't care."

Referring to the wildcat strikes by workers in Matamoros, she said, "I don't think Mexican workers are stealing our jobs. They are fighting and it's good. They work like slaves. We all need to take a stand. We have to show unity; that will make a difference. It doesn't matter if you are an older worker about to retire or a young person just getting a job in the plant or somewhere else—this is a struggle for everybody."

Ronda is a retired health care worker. She said, "My neighbor was laid off from the Hamtramck plant in 2017. They sent him to school, but he never got rehired. He is young and has a child that he had around the time he got laid off who is about two years old now. I will tell him and all the other laid-off workers to come. What do they have to lose? They have already taken their jobs.

"I am glad the workers in Mexico stood up and fought. It's not fair to pay them so little. The companies think they can move the plants anywhere they want, and the strike of the Mexican autoworkers shows it's not so easy anymore."

Alex works at the Chrysler Trenton Engine Plant in Trenton, Michigan. He's been closely following the developments of

workers' struggles in Matamoros and supported the call for a unified fight of US, Canadian, and Mexican workers.

"People are tired of not being able to pay their bills while the rich eat filet mignon. The way things are going, I think we're going to see in this country either a civil war or revolution break out."

When asked about tactics employed by Unifor and the UAW to divide workers with nationalist campaigns, such as the anti-Mexican campaign launched by Unifor, Alex responded, "This is what they've been doing for decades! I keep telling the younger workers here that the union is not fighting for us. The younger generation especially really has to wake up and recognize what's happening to them. They try to keep these younger workers in the dark and get them to think that this is just the way things are and that the union is actually representing them.

"Look at the workers in Mexico or what's happening in France," he said, referring to the ongoing Yellow Vests protests. "People are out on the streets against their corrupt governments and against the rich."

A John Deere worker in Iowa said, "I support the February 9 demonstration and urge workers internationally to support it as well.

"The question of the unions is ultimately a historical question. The betrayals of the union bureaucrats who now act as parasitical labor managers is not something that happened overnight.

"The UAW has not called a national strike for over 30 years. What happened? I remember when I first started working at John Deere in the 90s. They told us not to talk to the older workers. Why? Because they didn't want us to understand what the unions used to be like. They didn't want us to get any ideas about going on strike. They definitely don't want a general strike, which I think needs to happen today.

"This was also around the time they introduced the two-tier system. The UAW told us we had to make a sacrifice to keep John Deere afloat. Well, John Deere is doing just fine and we're still paying for it, just like what they did to autoworkers.

"I support this fight by autoworkers!"

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter urges workers and young people to organize delegations from your factories, workplaces, schools and communities to attend the February 9 demonstration and send in your messages of support.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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