

Opposition to UAW-GM contract mounts at shuttered Lordstown, Ohio plant

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United Auto Workers (UAW) officials abruptly cancelled an informational meeting scheduled for Tuesday morning for workers at the Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant, initially citing security concerns after the UAW headquarters claimed it received threats.

Instead, the “information meeting” will be held on Thursday, the same day that workers are expected to vote on the contract.

UAW officials have arranged with the local police to provide security at the meeting. No doubt UAW executives want police on hand out of fear of the massive opposition from workers. Earlier this week, police were called out against workers opposing the contract in Spring Hill, Tennessee.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with workers who mistakenly showed up for the cancelled meeting as well as those who were on the picket lines outside the now shuttered plant.

The Lordstown Assembly Plant was shut down in March of this year when the last 1,500 workers on the day shift were laid off. In all, 4,500 workers have lost their jobs.

“This contract is the same as we had in 2015,” said Richard, who has worked at GM for 25 years. “[Temporary workers] are being treated like dirt. It is not right that someone can be standing by your side, doing the same job for three, four, or five years yet getting half the pay and crappy benefits.”

Asked if he believed that Ford and Chrysler workers should be on strike as well, Richard said, “They should have been out with us from the start. What they do to us, they will do to them.”

When the WSWS reporter pointed out that this also needed to include workers from Mexico and Canada, and that the UAW was trying to blame workers in Mexico for the layoffs in Lordstown, Richard responded that he felt there should be a united struggle.

“This is about corporate greed. They want as much as they can get, and they don’t care about the people making the cars.”

Paul had also shown up for the meeting. “They moved the meeting to Thursday. They said it was on the news, but nobody called me.

“I’m voting no. It’s just not fair for them to be closing this plant, it is not fair to anybody.

“I was a temp for four years. It’s not fair. I was hired in ‘08. I was hired on a Monday, and I came in on Tuesday and they said that GM up north [referring to GM’s headquarters in Detroit] said that they turned us all back to temp status.”

Workers laid off in Lordstown were given the option to transfer to other GM plants. Many took the transfer because they needed jobs. Official unemployment in Northeastern Ohio is close to 10 percent, but real unemployment is much higher.

Paul said he was not able to accept a transfer. “I’m not going to go. I was offered a job in Missouri. I have elderly parents that I have to take care of.

“It’s horrible. So many people have businesses here and families, and they just can’t relocate. So with this plant closing they are going to be losing out.” He added, “I see in the future that GM is going to close more plants. They are going to downsize when they go to electric vehicles and have people work at temp wages.”

Paul lived through the collapse of the steel industry throughout the Mahoning Valley. “I’ve gone through this with the steel industry in the 80s, then the housing industry and now the auto industry. In my life, I’ve lost three good paying jobs because they all went under. Corporate companies are all making the big profits.”

Paul agreed with the WSWS reporters when they pointed out the need to unite with Mexican and Canadian auto workers. “That is definitely true,” he said. “It would be fair if they all got the same wages that we got. These

companies are just shutting factories down that they don't have to."

Tommie and Roy were picketing one of the gates to the assembly plant. Tommie worked for GM for 21 years, and Roy for 23 years.

Roy felt that the proposed contract gives workers nothing they wanted, highlighting the extreme exploitation of temporary workers: "The present contract proposal is the 2015 experience all over again."

Workers "are not given time to study the contract," Roy added. He pointed to several workers who are facing a drive to Kentucky to vote on the contract. He sees no reason why this is so since they are all with the UAW.

Roy understands that workers everywhere face the same struggles. He noted that Mexican workers are very underpaid and cannot afford to buy the vehicles they make. He explained that "with profit levels being what they are, you'd expect the price would be lowered. Yet cars built by Mexican workers are sold at full price."

Tommie has been forced to transfer to Bowling Green, Kentucky. He said that his wife will have to quit her job and try to find new employment.

"I'm against the contract. They were supposed to offer us the 10 and 50, that if you have 10 years of service and are 50 years old you can retire. But for that to happen the plant had to be closed. But GM kept it 'unallocated,' but we didn't have a product. So they didn't have to honor that 10 and 50.

"If it is all about getting as many of us who are making the top dollar out, why not offer us that [retirement]. A lot of us would have taken it and in turn that would have helped the temp workers out as they could have filled our spots and become permanent.

"To me it is just a whole game. They figure that we will just accept anything."

Tommie also spoke on the conditions facing the temporary workers: "It's not fair how the temporaries are treated. If they are good enough to work next to us, but not get paid the same, that is a strain on them.

"We all had a temporary status at one point in our life here, but that was with the conception that we were going to be hired. But you can be here two, three, or four years and still have that temporary status. That is not right at all.

"We want fair and equal status for them guys because they are part of us."

Speaking on uniting with Mexican and Canadian workers, he said, "We should all be together, because it is one company. We are all in the car building process. Make a car here, make a car there, what's the difference?

"And you got this guy in the front office, you know the White House, looking out for all these companies. There is no trickle down effect. Now everybody is just putting all that money in their pocket. They come to the negotiation table and are right away talking about the concessions that we have to make.

"They say it's so we can remain 'competitive,' but the CEO here makes \$22 million."

Two workers who asked that their names not be used explained that they had been hired in 2008 only to get laid off when the housing crisis hit. One was off for a year, and the other for fifteen months. When they got called back, GM and the UAW had signed the agreement brokered by the Obama administration to allow the company to hire more temporary workers.

"It's one thing to be temporary for 90 days, everybody does that," one worker said. "But to string them along year after year doing the same thing, holding out the promise of a permanent job? The company is making billions. It is time that the workers get treated right."

On the treatment of Mexican workers, the worker said, "We should all unite. They are getting paid just \$1.90 an hour. GM brings those cars in, and they make enormous profits. Those workers have families they are trying to support, and all the companies care about is more and more money."

Tony worked at the plant for 10 years, and was a temporary worker for four years. "I think is a disgrace. I can see a year; I can see 18 months. Four years, 5 years [pointing to another worker], sometimes longer? They're making a killing. They're making a killing at our expense.

"Every working man should be an ally to the working man. Truck drivers, dishwashers, plumbers, you know. If it wasn't for us, the rich wouldn't be rich.

"They don't always display that solidarity, but they fight the same issues; they have the same struggles everywhere. Our grandparents, our parents struggled to raise our way of life.

"At this point, I'm 66 years old. I've made my life what it is. I feel bad for the younger people that have families, people that had to relocate because of corporate greed. Mary Barra's not relocating."



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