

GM fires Flint workers over social media posts during strike

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In the aftermath of the United Auto Workers' shutdown of the General Motors strike, the company has conducted retaliatory firings of workers for their social media posts during the 40-day walkout.

While the number of victimized workers is still unclear, at least three were workers at the Flint Truck Assembly Plant, one of GM's largest and most profitable factories. One of the workers is Juan Gonzales, a 19-year veteran of General Motors, who was confronted by GM Global Security when he arrived at work on Monday morning and taken to labor relations where he was shown pictures from his Facebook page. Gonzales was then summarily fired.

In a post on his Facebook page Monday morning, Gonzales wrote: "In labor terminated! Do not post on any social media sites they, GM security out of Detroit are on them and everything I posted during the whole strike was in a [m]anila envelope, everything. Stay off them!"

Gonzales is an outspoken worker who posts comments on several Facebook pages where autoworkers speak out, including against the collusion of the UAW with the corporation. He was also interviewed on the picket line in front of the Flint Assembly plant several times by local media. On the very first day of the strike, September 16, he denounced GM for making record profits and giving workers nothing, telling an NBC 25 reporter that the company "continues to make all the gains and we remain where we're at."

In an effort to justify this outrageous violation of free speech, the *Detroit Free Press* and other corporate media have reported unsubstantiated claims that the workers were fired for posting threatening messages on social media or allegedly participating in violent incidents on the picket line. The *Free Press* quotes an unnamed "person familiar with the terminations" saying, "It ties to bomb threats and threats of actual violence made on the line."

The workers have refuted this slanderous lie. One of the

victimized workers, who did not want his name used, told the local ABC-TV affiliate that he was fired for posting comments that he was "going to crack some eggs" out of frustration but he was not threatening any violence.

Gonzales and other workers are clearly being targeted for exercising their First Amendment rights and criticizing the giant corporation, which is shutting plants and destroying the livelihoods and communities of thousands of workers and condemning a whole generation to the status of low-paid temporary laborers. Workers have told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that GM Global Security agents are using fake profiles to troll private social media pages and monitor workers' comments, and also must have scanned the local media coverage of the strike.

"Evidently GM Global Security has people on every union and UAW page," a worker at the FCA Jeep Assembly Plant in Toledo, Ohio told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. "They confronted Juan with a folder filled with posts he made on 10 different pages."

Another Toledo Jeep worker said, "I didn't find anything nefarious when I researched Juan's posts. The *Detroit Free Press* is reporting that all those being fired were inciting violence (calling for others to bring weapons to the strike line to stop scabs, etc). I personally have not seen one post or comment by anyone regarding anything of the sort."

In its official statement, GM made it clear that it is meting out punishment to intimidate workers who dare resist the dictatorial regime inside the factories that will be enforced by the UAW under the terms of the new contract.

GM told Detroit's 7 Action News, "We can confirm the employees have been dismissed from Flint Assembly due to violations of company policy. Our team members play a critical role in our success, and the new four-year labor

agreement recognizes those important contributions with an industry-leading wage and benefit package. As we restart operations, we are moving forward as one team and staying focused on our priorities of safety and building high quality vehicles for our customers.”

The firing of the Flint workers follows GM’s decision to fire nine militant workers at its Silao, Mexico plant who voted to defy company and union demands to increase production during the US strike. The Silao workers make the same Silverado and Sierra trucks that US workers build at the Flint Assembly and Ft. Wayne, Indiana plants.

Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers who have opposed the UAW sellout at GM and want to fight concession demands are also being victimized. A Fiat Chrysler worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “We were told we will be fired if we post anything on social media or talk with other workers about the upcoming contract. At a plant meeting they said we legacy workers are plotting against the company and the union and put us on notice to be terminated for talking to the younger generation of workers about contractual language and language agreements.

“We have nobody to turn to help us because the union is letting the company do whatever they want to do to the workers regardless of contractual agreements. The harassment is out of control. We are also being forced to work through every break and told not to report injuries.”

The UAW International and Local 598 officials in Flint have acknowledged that the firings have taken place and made it clear they will do nothing to seriously fight this blatant attempt to intimidate workers. “All issues will be addressed through our Local Unions and our contracts’ grievance process which applied during the work stoppage,” the UAW International said in a statement to the local news media.

The fact is the UAW supports the company making examples of militant workers. During the strike, the UAW deliberately isolated the GM workers, keeping more than 100,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers on the job despite GM’s use of scabs, including in Flint. Well aware that it would face widespread opposition, local union officials in Spring Hill, Tennessee called the police on workers campaigning against the sellout contract. Running roughshod over the democratic rights of workers, the UAW rushed through a series of ratification votes before workers had sufficient time to study and discuss the tentative agreement, and then announced that the deal had passed by 56 to 44 percent, based on large “yes” votes at

plants like Flint Assembly, which workers charged were manipulated.

Workers have every right to speak their minds and use social media to organize opposition, free from the spying of the corporations and the UAW. That right is guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US Constitution. It is also part of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act clause of “Protected Concerted Activity,” which guarantees the right of workers “to act together to try to improve their pay and working conditions, with or without a union.”

After receiving many protests from workers complaining that their rights were being violated, in 2012 the NLRB found that several employers, including General Motors, had unlawfully violated federal labor law through their restrictive social media policy. GM said that despite the NLRB’s recommendations, the company was not changing its policy, maintaining that it “complies with applicable laws.”

Instead, the UAW has upheld GM’s undemocratic social media rules, which “includes posting or forwarding posts containing rumors, malicious statements, or negative comments toward GM or any of its employees as found in our Local Agreement Shop Rule 30,” one local union writes.

Workers must demand the reinstatement of all victimized workers, from Flint Assembly to Silao, Mexico. The fight against the firing and disciplining of militant workers and to defend the right to free expression and collective resistance will not be guaranteed by the UAW. It can only be fought for through the building of rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the corrupt UAW, to mobilize all workers in opposition to the union-management dictatorship in the factories.

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter urges call workers to attend the call-in meeting Thursday, 7pm Eastern Time to discuss the lessons of the GM strike. To register, go to: wsws.org/autocall



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