

Stop UAW-backed speedup scheme at GM Flint Assembly!

GM Flint Rank and File Committee
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The following is a statement of the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee. To contact the committee and get involved, email: gm.flint.rfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this statement.

“The speedup was the biggest issue,” recalled Genora Johnson, a socialist and Trotskyist, and a leader of the 1936-37 Flint sit-down strike, together with her husband Kermit. “Conditions were terrible inside the plants, which were notorious for their speedup systems. They had men with stopwatches timing the workers to see if they could squeeze one or two more operations in. The men just couldn’t take it. They would come home at night. They couldn’t hold their forks in their swollen fingers. They would just lie down on the floor.”

Eighty-seven years since the sit-down strike, the UAW bureaucracy is promoting a speedup competition between the shifts at GM Flint Assembly as “friendly competition.” Eric Welter, UAW Local 598 plant chairman, proudly joined with GM Plant Executive Director Chad Pung to launch the campaign, called “Drive for HD (Heavy Duty) Dominance.”

The aim is for each of our three shifts to produce 380 Silverado heavy duty trucks, for a total of 1,140 trucks per day. The shift that “wins” will be “rewarded” with a pizza lunch and a few extra minutes added to our totally inadequate 30-minute lunch break. This is disgusting and degrading! To say that the sit-downers would be rolling over in their graves is an understatement.

GM just announced it made \$10 billion in profits last year and is handing top executives and shareholders record stock buybacks and dividend increases. Now the UAW bureaucracy is helping the company whip more production and profits out of us with this speed up scheme. There is growing anger throughout the plant over this. We found that the word for this is called “whipsawing,” which the seniority workers are familiar with from decades of pitting one plant against another and American workers against our brothers and sisters in other countries. Whoever accepts the worst conditions and the lowest wages and benefits will keep their jobs. It was a race to the bottom which destroyed hundreds

of thousands of jobs.

One worker commented on Facebook, warning coworkers of the possibility of an even greater increase in productivity. He explained:

With the last line speed increase we actually went to 57 jobs per hour. The line speed at the end of final line is 62.5 seconds per job, which would be 422 jobs per shift if the line only stopped at breaks. If you look at the bingo board at the start of the shift, you will see the goal is 387, but the actual jobs possible is 422...

Prior to the official announcement of the competition (which was never widely circulated) that began January 18 and will end March 18, workers were questioning the noticeable increase in the line speed. By January 16, several workers raised concerns about the increased line speeds and were told by Welter, “There is no line speed increase—that is our daily build. I didn’t think it was all that dramatic, they have tried dumb sh**t like this several times over my career. **I didn’t see it as something to fight** (emphasis added), the build can be made or it can’t. I don’t think a free meal is the difference maker.”

In other words, the highly paid union officials, who do not work on the line, will sign off on whatever maximum speed they and the company can force on us. There will be no end to the constant demands for more productivity.

We are already having difficulty keeping up with the line. Speedup will also greatly increase the likelihood of injuries and even workplace fatalities. We are paying for our own measly pay raise by producing more vehicles and risking more damage to our bodies. We could be working ourselves out of a job.

If the UAW backs such competition between workers, where will it end? Why not bring back the piecework system, where workers are paid according to output?

All of these schemes are designed to divide workers. Commenting on a “group bonus system” used in the auto plants more than a 100 years ago, one historian wrote that it “made the men take over the foreman’s call to ‘hurry up,’ exerting pressure on the slower men to keep up so as not to lessen the group’s wages. ... There were instances of workers fighting outside the plant, faster workers beating up slower ones to persuade them to work faster and keep pay rates high.”

The speedup is part of the overall cost-cutting by the automakers and is a further exposure of the pro-company character of the supposed “historic” contracts signed by UAW President Shawn Fain and the UAW bureaucracy. Fain pushed through the contract with the promise that temps would be rolled over to full-time and COLA would be fully restored. He dropped the original wage demand from a 46 percent increase to 25 percent. He lied about everything.

At Stellantis, thousands of Supplemental Employees (temps) are being fired, with the complicity of the UAW. In addition, 1,500 Ford Rouge workers are being laid off.

At the nearby GM Orion Assembly plant, 945 workers began an indefinite layoff in January, which may last 18-24 months. Seniority workers will be transferred to the GM complex in Flint, which will likely force out temps and lower seniority workers.

Clearly, the UAW bureaucracy’s collaboration with the Big Three and the Biden White House has produced contracts that will facilitate a jobs massacre. Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of jobs will be eliminated as the automakers shift production to electric vehicles, which is estimated to require 40 percent less labor in the US and globally.

Whatever Fain’s promises about a “fair, more transparent” UAW and his rhetoric about opposing the “company unionism” of his predecessors, his administration has taken collaboration with the auto bosses and the government to an even higher level. The integration of the union apparatus into the structure of management as well as the government is very far advanced.

The term for this is corporatism. It is the subordination of the independent interests of rank-and-file workers to the profits and the war drive of the corporations and the government. The union bureaucracy’s role is to police us on behalf of the company.

Fain was brought into the UAW presidency to provide a facelift to the thoroughly discredited and corrupt UAW apparatus. Using militant and “left” sounding words, provided by his speechwriters from the Democratic Socialists of America and Bernie Sanders campaigns, he launched his phony “stand up” strike, which kept us and the majority of UAW members in the plants producing profits.

This had all been worked out with the Biden administration, which sees the expansion of EV production as critical to the American ruling class’ economic and military confrontation with China. In exchange for the UAW bureaucracy selling out the workers, Biden pressed GM and the other automakers to let the UAW collect dues from the workers in the EV battery plants, who will be starting out at the sub-par wage of \$20 an hour.

On January 25, Fain and the UAW executive board endorsed warmonger Joe Biden for president. But Biden is no less a tool of the corporations and enemy of the working class than Donald Trump. We must link together the fight against job cuts and exploitation with the fight against war and the endless demands for “sacrifice” to pay for it.

We urge workers to join and expand the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). We must defend our interests against the UAW apparatus, the auto companies and both the Democrats and Republicans.

- Stop the whipsawing and competition between workers!
- Rank-and-file control over line speed and safety!
- Call a mass membership meeting to oppose the speedup and layoffs.
- Reduce the length of the workday and increase pay to account for the fewer hours needed to produce EVs and to make up for decades of stagnant wages.
- Unite across borders to fight the global jobs massacre.
- Place the auto industry under social ownership and democratic workers’ control!

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