

“The fight against plant closures should be seen as a fight of all workers”

## Students across the United States speak out in defense of autoworkers

By the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)  
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*The WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is holding an emergency meeting this Sunday, December 9 at 2 p.m. in Detroit to organize a fight against the plant closures. We urge workers and youth to make plans to attend. Let us know you are attending and share the event on Facebook.*

After General Motors (GM) announced their plans to cut nearly 15,000 jobs and close five automotive plants in the United States and Canada, autoworkers have been outraged and are determined to fight back. They have received support from workers across the country, as well as internationally, to launch a united struggle against the auto corporations independently of the unions. The United Auto Workers (UAW) and Unifor have integrated into corporate management, sharing in the spoils from the exploitation of the workers in return for suppressing strikes and imposing cuts in jobs, wages, benefits and safety.

To wage a successful fight against the auto giants, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* is calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees to take up the functions long ago abandoned by the UAW and Unifor, and fight for the broadest mobilization of the entire working class. The building and maintenance of such committees demands a new political strategy of, by and for the working class, based on socialist internationalism and independent of the two corporate-controlled parties and trade unions. Autoworkers will discuss these vital questions at the emergency meeting in Detroit on December 9.

In the buildup to the emergency meeting, members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) spoke to young people from across the United States about the planned plant closures, the conditions facing workers and youth, and the fight to organize workers against the mass layoffs and forced concessions.

As with the corporate-driven attacks on workers, the conditions facing students and youth—debt, joblessness, and

rising living costs—have driven the growth of opposition to capitalism. The statements of support coming from youth and students reflect a stance of solidarity for autoworkers.

Elijah, a student at Wayne State University in Detroit, one of the cities where the planned closures will hit the hardest, explained to IYSSE members his own experience with the auto industry. “My dad is an auto worker and I remember when the financial crisis hit and lots of people lost their jobs.” After his mom was laid off in 2009, his dad had to take on a higher workload. “I’ve seen an increase in stress on him. It takes more than just a physical toll. It takes a toll psychologically, too. I think this is what happened to lots of families after 2008.

“It would be a lot better if people could have decent jobs,” Elijah said. “I definitely oppose the auto layoffs and support the workers. If I could say something to the auto workers who are fighting the closures I would tell them that they aren’t alone. We support them!”

Another student at Wayne State University, named Almas, expressed a similar anger about the plant closures. “If this is how they are treating workers now then I think the future will be way worse,” she said.

Almas told the IYSSE about her own struggle with paying for college and connected this to the conditions of workers generally. “I think everyone has the right to a decent wage,” she said. “Many of the workers have families! They need to be able to support them.”

Rachel, a Political Science major at San Diego State University (SDSU), supported the call to fight back against mass layoffs.

“These plant closures show how much control corporations have over workers. This will affect their entire lives—15,000 people! Job layoffs expand into different industries too like service work. Once one company starts doing it, others jump on the bandwagon. The fight against

plant closures should be seen as a fight of all workers against unemployment, low wages, and corporate control.”

Ethan is an Economics major at University of Michigan who recently joined the IYSSE. He described the layoffs and the corrupt role of the UAW as “a slap in the face to the working class.” Ethan also spoke about the history of autoworkers “shedding their blood, sweat, and tears for better conditions.”

“Looking to the example of the Flint Sit Down Strikes of 1936 and the Battle of the Overpass, socialists in the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and IYSSE are again ready to stand in solidarity with GM workers to retain their dignity and history against the bourgeois management and the corrupt trade union bureaucracy.”

In the 1940s and 50s, strikes by millions of industrial workers secured the right to pensions and employer-paid health care benefits, in addition to higher wages and living standards. This transformation was epitomized by Detroit which by 1960 had the highest per capita income of any city in the US. The “Motor City” also had the highest home ownership rate and among the best public schools in the country. Today, the city and its surrounding communities have been gutted by decades of deindustrialization.

“Detroit tells the tale of the American worker,” said Blake, a Mechanical Engineering student at Portland State University in Oregon. He noted that after the transformation of the world economy and complete globalization of production in the 1970s, the auto factories that once covered the Midwestern region “lay like bones, devoured by capitalism. While corporate profits expanded, the cities that gave them life were abandoned.”

He stated that the anarchy of capitalism, the free market as it is called, allowed the auto corporations to move production wherever they could exploit workers the most and reap profits. In opposition to decades-long assault on workers in the United States and internationally, Blake is enthusiastic about the struggle of autoworkers being prepared. “It is time to rebuild the laboring class, to unite workers from all industries and countries for a better world.”

The destruction of decent-paying jobs and industries built by the working class will affect the conditions of the newer generation, many of whom will be confronted with a life of poverty, debts, low-wage labor, and social misery with the continued decline of their living standards.

“Capitalism is systemically depressing the working class” and “killing working class communities,” said Jacob, a Northern Virginia Community College student. He explained that he was appalled to learn of the layoffs planned by the auto companies, given how much it will impact the lives of thousands of workers. “The rich are just

being selfish. Workers have families as well.”

Ned, a graduate-level Sociology student at Portland State University, was inspired by the call to wage a unified fight against the GM layoffs, adding that workers’ determination will be a source of motivation for workers and even students around the world. “The fight they [autoworkers] are engaged in—for the right to full employment, dignity, and security—is the fight of all workers in this age,” he said.

Emma, an exchange student from the UK studying at San Francisco State University, echoed this sentiment. “I would like to see workers go on strike.” She added that autoworkers must fight for their own interests against the divisions imposed by the unions, the two major parties, and the rest of the capitalist establishment. “A strike can’t just be at one shop or one company, it’s got to be united. The working class struggles internationally.”

Shuvu, a member of the IYSSE at the University of California at Los Angeles, declared the club’s support of the autoworkers against the betrayals of the UAW and the greed of the companies. “At a time when the CEO’s and executives of GM and Ford are taking home record pay and bonuses, these shameless corporations have gone on to cut workers’ pay and fire them from their jobs ... And what are the unions doing about it? Absolutely nothing! In fact these unions are in on it and have been caught multiple times taking bribes from the auto corporations.”

“The workers of Detroit shouldn’t accept these injustices and should fight against it. Like the Yellow Vest strike in France, it’s now time to show the world the power of workers. These huge corporations only have power because we let them, and all it takes is a genuine revolt against them for their organizations to crumble.”

Appealing directly to the autoworkers in the United States, Canada and around the world, Shuvu said, “Break away from the unions, form independent rank-and-file committees, and launch a strike, free from the chains of the unions! The world will hear your voice and workers everywhere will fight with you!”

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