

“We have to stand up and learn how to be strong on our own”

## Workers at February 9 protest discuss fight against GM closings

By our reporters  
12 February 2019

Workers and young people who participated in the February 9 demonstration against GM plant closings and mass layoffs spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about why they joined the march and their reaction to the political issues discussed at the meeting afterwards.

The protest, which was called by the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, advanced an international strategy to mobilize autoworkers and the broadest layers of the working class against the corporate onslaught on jobs and living standards.

Conroy, worked at GM’s Detroit-Hamtramck plant for a year before losing his job when GM eliminated the second shift, wiping out 1,300 jobs. He now works at Wayne State University.

“I was a hi-lo driver for different divisions inside the plant and was there from 2016 to 2017.

“What’s going on affects everybody,” he said. “I made a bunch of friends there. A close friend of mine, her sister was a white-collar GM worker who got fired. They tapped everybody on the shoulder and just told them, ‘Come with me.’ They’re ushering in this new corporate way of doing things. I see a pattern. It is the start of a slippery slope. So, I came down to the rally to see what I could do to help.”

Conroy continued, “Working at that plant, I saw up close what the unions were doing. They’re in bed with the corporations. I really appreciate the talk about rank-and-file committees. Even people that don’t even listen to the news can see the truth about the unions. It’s everywhere on social media.

“GM had two different contracts with the union. The one I was under was a contract where we didn’t have

hardly any benefits compared to what you would expect from GM. The pay was very minimal. It was like there were two different classes in the same plant. So being in that lesser class, we had complaints, but nothing changed. The guys that are still there who couldn’t find other work, they had to deal with it.

“There were school districts in West Virginia and other states where the union advised them not to strike but the teachers continued to do it anyway. They joined with the bus drivers and the cafeteria servers. That was an inspirational story, when they went against the union. I’m in the union, but I don’t want to be. I give them dues, but I’m not impressed with them anymore than I was with the UAW at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant.”

Sending a message to the courageous workers who walked out of the maquiladora sweatshops and other work locations in Matamoros, Mexico, Conroy said, “We understand you. I personally hope we can come together to change the conditions that exist right now. Just keep pushing. We’re looking for a change too. We’re all part of the working class, whether we work for auto companies, or a corporation or for the state.”

Kathy, a contract worker for GM and a member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees, said, “We all came to this demonstration and meeting because we are uniting in opposition to the layoffs by GM. We want to unite workers and broaden the reach of the *WSWS* and the *Autoworker Newsletter* so we can build up a bigger and more powerful movement.

“We support the Matamoros workers and are very proud of them. I hope that a lot of us here in the States will have as much courage as they do. I know we will.

The autoworkers are just now hearing that there's people out here that care about them and want to see them fight for their jobs and their economic security.

"I see workers walked out of the GM office buildings every day. We've had hundreds that have been let go over the last couple months, without a word. We're union up there. I'm sick of the union and just wish they'd fall off the face of the earth. When you're looking at the devastation that is going to be wreaked on our economy from these layoffs, it's not going to be pretty. We have to stand up and learn how to be strong on our own.

"I grew up in Pontiac, Michigan. As a young person, I saw the devastation of that community by GM and the impact it had on wrecking businesses and the kids I went to school with. Families were destroyed. GM shut down all their production in Pontiac. There was nothing worth living there for anymore. All the business is gone.

"They're squeezing the working class. They want every penny and every drop to suffocate working class people. I don't understand how people can continue on working, working, working, struggling and not have anything to show for it. There are young people today who can't have a family because they can't afford to raise one. If they went to school, they have student loans to pay for. So, they don't have anything left. I see it all over the place.

"You listen to these idiots up in Congress, Republicans and Democrats. They don't care. They're not listening to the people out here. As far as I'm concerned, they're way out of touch. The workers need to take control. We've got to. We're not used to anything other than capitalism, but if we have to, we have to. And it looks like we're going to have to.

"We need to unite internationally and come together as the working class. That's what it's going to take."

George, a former UPS worker, said, "The march was excellent, well-organized and loud. As soon as I came from the People Mover [public train], I could hear everything. But the speakers were the best part. It was a great step forward.

"I never would have heard of the struggle of the Mexican autoworkers in Matamoros if it wasn't for the *World Socialist Web Site*. It's a rank-and-file movement. The unions are corrupt. Look what they did to the Los Angeles teachers. The unions are just going

to betray. I worked for UPS and the union wouldn't protect me from being victimized. I never heard from them and lost my job."

Noah is a young worker at a French-owned, multinational, automotive electronics manufacturer in the northern suburbs of Detroit. The parts at his plant, he said, "are designed in Ireland or Germany, built in Mexico, tested and installed in vehicles in the United States, all by a company that is based in France." He agreed that there is no such thing as an "American-made" car, and that the effort to unite all workers against the attacks on jobs is of vital importance.

Nick, a Fiat Chrysler worker in Detroit and a member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees, said, "The demonstration successfully communicated that American, Canadian and Mexican workers are all part of the same international class struggle. I am grateful for the hard work of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party in building for this event.

"GM's bloodbath has already begun with Ford soon to follow. This is a shareholder-investor money grab by the wealthiest 1 percent. They want to further engorge themselves on the carcasses of the bottom 90 percent of society—the working class.

"Workers can no longer rely on the UAW or other trade union organizations that serve as a controlled opposition and collaborators with the corporations. The only solution to the crisis is for the working class to form rank-and-file committees independent of the unions to communicate, coordinate and plan a fight back.

"Committees in every workplace and neighborhood should coalesce into a congress of workers to take over the means of production and run society for human need. We have to unite with our international working-class brothers and sisters so we can work together for the benefit of everyone on the planet."

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>