

Organize rank-and-file committees to stop plant closings and overturn UAW concessions!

*Statement of the Socialist Equality Party
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Chrysler workers returning this week continue to face the brutal reality of the Obama administration's effort to return the bankrupt automaker to profitability. Workers have already been forced to accept massive wage and benefit concessions. Thousands have been laid off. Many of those returning this week have only a few months before their plants are scheduled to shut down.

The global economy is in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, including a collapse in US and international car sales. The company's new owners—Fiat, the White House and the UAW—will be back for more concessions, once again insisting this is the only way to keep the New Chrysler afloat.

Analysts are predicting that only a handful of auto companies will survive the coming wave of mergers, bankruptcies and acquisitions. The New York Times recently noted, "The global automotive industry is still too crowded. Despite the restructurings of General Motors and Chrysler, there is too much production capacity to make the sector attractive for investors. Without a big expansion of the market, something more has to give."

From the beginning, Obama's intervention in the auto industry had nothing to do with "saving" the jobs, communities and living standards of workers. On the contrary, the president and Wall Street investors leading his auto task force set out to plunder the retirement funds and remaining profitable assets of the automakers, and put an end to the last remnants of the achievements won by auto workers over generations of struggle.

A permanent restructuring of class relations is underway. A recent Businessweek article noted bluntly, "The most insidious part of this current downturn is that many organizations are not just downsizing their workforces, they're cutting wages for those individuals lucky enough to be kept on. Many such firms were purchased in leveraged buyouts over the past decade, and they owe so much that they can't both service their loans and keep paying the same wages."

Noting that after the recovery it was "highly unlikely" that lost income would be fully restored, the magazine continued, "Washington had a choice: Either allow all loans that aren't viable under current economic conditions to be written down to manageable levels, or allow workers and wages to be cut to free up enough

cash to make those loans perform. It should be obvious to most by now which strategy Washington chose."

Form independent rank-and-file committees to oppose plant closures

If workers are to defend themselves against this attack, they must begin a fight now. Workers must reject the lie promoted by the UAW that there is no way to oppose the attack on jobs and wages, that there is no alternative to the decades-long policy of surrender and defeat.

The SEP calls on workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW to initiate a struggle against the destruction of jobs, living standards and working conditions. These committees will plan mass opposition, including:

1. Planning the occupation of all plants threatened with closure.
2. Mobilizing all Chrysler, GM and Ford workers, along with auto parts workers and auto workers recently laid off.
3. Uniting the working class by linking the struggle of auto workers with teachers and students facing school closings and budget cutbacks, workers at car dealerships being closed, city workers facing wage cuts and layoffs, and all other sections of the working class.
4. Beginning preparations for a general strike in the Detroit-Metro area and the development of a national campaign of opposition to the attacks on the working class.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans

Such a struggle must be guided by a new political strategy, which recognizes the need for mobilizing the working class against the Democratic Party and the Obama administration.

Obama is using the attack on auto workers to spearhead an assault on every section of the working class, much in the same way as Reagan's firing of the air traffic controllers in 1981 signaled the beginning of a corporate-government offensive that continues to this day.

In addition to handing over trillions in public assets to bail out those responsible for triggering the worst financial crisis since the Depression, the White House is demanding that workers and their families live on less. This is exactly what it did in the auto bailout, where billions were robbed from retirement and health care funds in order to pay JP Morgan Chase, Citigroup and other secured lenders.

Break with the United Auto Workers

In its attack, the administration has relied on the UAW to lie to workers and suppress any resistance to plant closings, mass layoffs and wage and benefit concessions. In return, the UAW apparatus has been given a majority stake in Chrysler and a large chunk of GM.

In a recent Washington Post column called "Tomorrow's Auto Industry," UAW President Ron Gettelfinger boasted that the union had given Chrysler and GM a "fresh start," by helping to impose "significant cost reductions at a severe human cost." This included the third round of concessions in the last four years, under which, "Workers have accepted frozen and reduced wages; retirees living on fixed incomes will pay higher health-care costs." Sounding like a Wall Street pitchman, Gettelfinger insisted, these measures were necessary to "free up funds to reinvest in the businesses and make private investment more attractive."

The UAW executives stand on the opposite side of the barricades. Gettelfinger & Co. are allied with the hedge fund managers and big investors. The UAW is not an instrument of struggle, but the greatest barrier to the emergence of independent opposition in the working class.

An international strategy

For years, the UAW and the Democratic Party blamed job losses and wage-cutting on "foreign competition" and

"unfair trade." Once again, they are promoting economic nationalism to blur over the reality that it is the pursuit of private profit, not workers in other countries, that is responsible for the attack on workers' jobs and living standards.

The starting point of any serious struggle is not fighting for "American" or "Canadian" or "European" jobs, but waging a common struggle to defend the jobs of all workers.

For equality and socialism

If the jobs, living standards and communities of auto workers are to be protected, workers must begin to assert their own class interests in conscious opposition to the predatory aims of the financial elite and its political front men.

Economic life can no longer be subordinated to the interests of the wealthiest one percent of the population. The working class must break the stranglehold that these financial parasites exercise over the economy by nationalizing the banks under the democratic control of working people. Only in this way can society's wealth—created by the labor of working people, not the financial manipulations of speculators—be put to use for the common good, not individual enrichment.

The auto industry can no longer be left in the hands of corporate CEOs and big investors. Instead it must be transformed into a public utility, under workers' control, in order to guarantee the jobs and living standards of all workers and produce safe, affordable and high quality transportation.

In the US, the struggle for this perspective requires the building of the Socialist Equality Party as a mass political party of the working class. We urge all workers who are looking for a way to fight to contact us today.

Socialist Equality Party Public Conference
A Socialist Response to the Economic Crisis

Saturday, July 25, 1- 4 p. m.
Wayne State University
General Lectures Room 150
5045 Anthony Wayne Drive
Detroit