

Letter to GM strikers from an Australian car worker

"The unions use nationalism to divide the workers"

22 July 1998

SP, who works in Toyota's plant at Altona in Melbourne, Australia, has addressed the following letter to the American GM workers.

Dear Workers,

As a carworker for Toyota Motor Corporation in Australia I support your fight to defend your jobs. The car industry internationally has gone into intense competition, and it is workers in GM Flint, Toyota in Australia or Opel in Germany who pay a bitter price.

I have been reading your comments and discussions through the *World Socialist Web Site*. Most of your experiences with management and the union are similar to ours in Australia. One worker mentioned GM stopping its \$300 million investment plan in Flint. Toyota also has its plan to invest in Melbourne. About two months back, the company Employee Bulletin announced they are going to invest \$A1 billion to build a new passenger vehicle called the Avalon. This car will be exported to the United States and other countries. In the same Bulletin, the progress of that investment program is made dependent on how the employees commit themselves to increase productivity with the current Camry model. If workers do not increase their productivity, the company won't invest. The union, to intimidate the workers, also supports these management scare tactics.

As you have experienced, workers have been trapped by all possible methods. When the new Camry model was launched in 1997, the company called a few meetings to tell us cars had been built with poor quality. They said we had to reduce our defect rate, and that if we didn't improve it, we might lose our contract to Japan.

Meanwhile the union bureaucrats are promoting the notion that Australian workers can build the best

quality cars. And they quite often say that cars from Korea are poor quality. The end result of this is that workers are forced to work faster, become stressed and start fighting among themselves. Quite often workers feel guilty because they can't catch up the line or perform quality work.

The transformation of the unions today is an international phenomenon. Many workers think the unions no longer defend the workers' interests, but they don't see how they can fight against the union bureaucracy. Quite often workers don't speak against the union because their job will be on the line if they do.

In recent years Toyota Australia's export market increased by 15 to 20 percent. As a world car producer, they picked the Melbourne plant to reach world's best practice--with reliable parts suppliers and less production disruption, in order to run 'just in time' production. The company called a few meetings to tell the workers: 'We are a global company and we must be a strong market leader.' The union bureaucrats go hand in hand with them to implement whatever demand the company makes.

The profit makers, such as GM, Ford, Toyota or whoever, are NOT based on one country. The recent merger of Daimler-Chrysler says it all. The big companies operate globally. Meanwhile the unions use nationalism to divide the workers. In fact, workers in every country are facing similar experiences. The danger is for workers at GM Flint or any other workers to see their struggle within their national boundaries. Those primarily responsible for this happening are the unions and the political parties, which promote nationalism. The way forward for car workers is to unite with workers internationally.

Yours fraternally,

SP

See Also:

The GM strike, globalization and the UAW

[16 July 1998]

Overwhelming vote for strike at Saturn

Auto workers turn away from GM-UAW collaboration

[21 July 1998]



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