

A socialist strategy for American Axle workers

D'Artagnan Collier
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American Axle and Manufacturing, the Michigan-based auto parts manufacturer, has told workers it will stop production at its main plant in Detroit-Hamtramck after Friday, May 15. It is not clear if the plant will reopen. If it does, it will be with far fewer workers. The following statement is from D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Detroit Mayor.

Some 500 to 600 auto workers will be laid off, likely permanently, with the shuttering of the main Detroit-Hamtramck American Axle plant on Friday. Four hundred workers at the AAM plant in Three Rivers, Michigan, will also be out of work on Monday.

The elimination of these jobs is the direct outcome of the United Auto Workers' smothering of the three-month-long strike by 4,000 AAM workers last year. Union executives told workers that the only way they could save their jobs was to accept major wage and benefit cuts.

As has happened so many times before, the concessions pushed through by the UAW have only paved the way for more job cuts, while providing yet another benchmark for the continued assault on auto workers throughout the industry.

The UAW is now telling workers that the shutdown of the AAM plant is only temporary and that many workers will return to work in 10 weeks. Workers should place no confidence in these claims, which are aimed at preventing workers from taking any independent action to oppose the plant closure.

The destruction of jobs at American Axle is part of a broader attack by the corporate-financial elite on auto workers and the working class as a whole. The economic crisis is being seized on as an opportunity to restructure class relations in the United States, destroying jobs, slashing wages and eliminating

benefits for millions of workers.

The Obama administration is now leading this attack. It has already pushed Chrysler into bankruptcy in order to facilitate the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs and the imposition of massive concessions. It is likely that General Motors will soon declare bankruptcy as well in order to accomplish the same ends.

The administration has worked closely with the United Auto Workers. Last month, the UAW pushed through a new concessions contract with Chrysler that eliminates what little remains of the gains won by auto workers in a previous period. In return, the "union" will be given a 55 percent ownership stake in a "new" Chrysler. A similar deal is being now being worked out at GM, as always behind the backs of the workers.

During the three-month strike at American Axle, the UAW refused to make any broader appeal to auto workers beyond AAM, even though the strike won widespread sympathy from workers throughout the city. The strike was isolated and workers were strung out on meager pay from the union's nearly \$1 billion strike fund.

It is now clear that the isolation and defeat of the strike by the UAW was to buy time for American Axle to carry out a major restructuring, which included widely rumored plans to close the Detroit plant. Since workers returned, the company has been removing material and machinery.

In shutting down last year's strike, UAW officials threatened American Axle workers that if they did not accept poverty wages and conditions, jobs would be shifted to Mexico. In so doing, the UAW was acting as an agent of CEO Richard Dauch, who made similar threats. Now these threats, supposedly averted by the bad contract, have been realized.

The endless imposition of wage and benefit

concessions has not defended a single job. Nor has the UAW's ceaseless denunciations of foreign workers and "Buy American" campaigns, which only serve to drive a wedge between US workers and our brothers and sisters throughout the world. There is no way forward for workers outside of a coordinated international struggle. In fact, auto workers face the same attacks all over the world—in Canada, Europe, Asia and Mexico.

The working class needs a radically new strategy to defend its jobs and living conditions, which will include:

1. Revival of direct struggle based upon the independent interests of the working class. Workers should organize demonstrations, strikes and factory occupations—the militant traditions of an earlier period that have been suppressed by the trade union bureaucracy. The UAW is not a working class organization, but a branch of corporate management, tasked with policing workers and containing opposition. The SEP calls on auto workers to form a rank-and-file opposition coordinating committee to fight against the corporations and their collaborators in the UAW. A mood of opposition is building up in the working class, and a decisive stand by auto workers will win broad support.

2. A break with the Democratic Party and the politics of class collaboration. Industrial action must be linked to a new political strategy. For decades, the unions have promoted the myth that the interests of workers can be advanced through the Democratic Party. The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, represent the corporations and banks. The Obama administration fully supports the assault on the auto workers. Workers need a new political party based upon their independent interests.

3. Rejection of the capitalist market and revival of an international socialist movement of the working class. Workers within the United States and throughout the world are facing the consequences of an economic system whose central principle is the pursuit of private profit—regardless of its consequences for society as a whole. In response to the unfolding crisis of world capitalism, the SEP fights for the socialist reorganization of the economy. This includes the nationalization of the auto companies and the major banks, placing them under public ownership, and the democratic control of the working population, and their

operation on the basis of social need, not private profit.

A revived political movement of the working class must have as its aim the fight for a workers' government—a government of, by and for the working class. The population of the world is being taught an object lesson in the class nature of the state under capitalism. Trillions of dollars have been handed out with no conditions to the giant banks and financial institutions. However, any loans to the auto industry are conditioned on massive concessions from the workers. In both instances, the state is directly functioning as an instrument of the most powerful sections of the financial elite.

The restructuring of the auto companies is having drastic consequences in many countries, including the destruction of thousands of jobs in Canada and Europe. In every country workers face a similar future: rising unemployment, declining wages, economic depression. Workers should reject all forms of nationalism and chauvinism promoted by the trade unions. The crisis of capitalism is a global crisis, and the response of the working class to this crisis must be a global response.

I am running for mayor of Detroit to provide a political voice for the working class. The global economic crisis that threatens the jobs and livelihoods of hundreds of millions underscores the pressing need for the independent intervention of the working class on the basis of its own program.

I urge all workers who are looking for a way to fight the corporations and their political representatives to contact us today, support my campaign for mayor of Detroit, join the SEP and take up the fight for socialism.

Click here to contact the SEP and take part in its mayoral campaign.



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