

For a united fight by all auto workers! No to job and wage cuts!

Socialist Equality Party
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party are distributing this statement to auto workers at the European and Asian-owned factories in the southern US states to fight for a unified struggle by all auto workers.

All over the US and around the world workers in the auto industry are facing the threat of layoffs and a ruthless race to the bottom over wages, benefits and working conditions.

Increasingly, workers in South Carolina and Alabama are confronting the same struggle as workers in Michigan and Ohio, or for that matter Germany, Japan and Korea. A common fight must be taken up to defend the right to a secure and good-paying job for every worker and to oppose the plans by the auto companies to carry out mass layoffs, plant closings and wage cuts.

Far from an economic recovery, the US and world economy are mired in a deep depression. More than 25 million workers lack a full time job, and poverty is at the highest level in half a century. Rather than providing any relief, the Obama administration and both big business parties are handing more tax cuts to the rich and paying for it by slashing money from schools, health care and pensions.

They claim that pouring more money into the hands of the corporate elite will create jobs. This is a lie. After receiving a multi-trillion dollar bailout, the big corporations and Wall Street banks are sitting on a cash hoard of \$2 trillion—and refusing to hire anybody, let alone increase the wages of those still working and struggling to make ends meet.

Ford's top two CEOs were paid \$98 million last year.

This is more than the \$95 million it would take to give a small wage increase to the company's 41,000 production workers, who have not had a raise since 2003. But the company insists it cannot do it. For his part, Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn pocketed \$11.46 million last year.

The \$14 an hour accepted by the United Auto Workers for new hires at GM, Ford and Chrysler has set off a scramble to lower wages throughout the global auto industry. In Europe, Fiat has threatened to close plants and shift production to the US for cheaper labor.

In the past, the foreign-owned companies paid hourly wages close to those in the North to defeat any organizing drives. With the UAW driving down wages, the companies in the South will soon follow suit to "stay competitive." Volkswagen's new Chattanooga plant is already paying \$14.50 an hour, lower than any European or Asian-owned factory in the US.

Auto workers must take a stand to defend the right to a secure and decent paying job and good working conditions. In conducting a struggle to oppose all job cuts and wage reductions, workers in the South have their greatest allies in their brothers and sisters in the northern plants.

The biggest obstacle to a common struggle is the United Auto Workers—which is not a "union" in any genuine sense of the word, but a business dedicated to the defense, not of workers, but the corporations. In the current negotiations for GM, Ford and Chrysler, the UAW has already accepted the expansion of poverty level wages and the replacement of hourly wage increases with bogus pay-for-performance schemes.

The UAW has recently made noises about organizing

non-union auto plants. They have appealed not to the workers, but to the auto bosses at BMW, Nissan, Toyota and other companies. In exchange for the chance to collect millions in membership dues, the UAW has promised not to seek any wage increases and pledged to help management drive up productivity and profits just like it has done for the Detroit-based companies.

There is deep opposition among rank-and-file workers against the UAW and a growing sense that a new organization is needed to defend the interests of auto workers.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the company and the UAW, to forge the greatest unity of all workers—full-time and temporary, young and older. Such committees must establish lines of communication with workers in every auto plant—throughout the South and the North—and oppose every effort to pit workers against each other in the fight over jobs.

The two-tier wage system and temporary employment must be abolished, all wage and benefit reductions restored and every worker guaranteed a living wage and a annual cost of living improvement pegged to the rate of inflation.

Such an organization is needed but it must be based on an understanding that the working class in the US and internationally is in a fight against the capitalist profit system and the politicians, both Democratic or Republican, who are controlled by big business. At the center of a successful struggle must be a rejection of the poisonous “buy American” nationalism promoted for decades by the unions, including the UAW.

Over the last thirty years, both parties have carried out the systematic transfer of society’s wealth from the working class that produces it into the pockets of the financial and corporate elite.

The deindustrialization of Detroit and other manufacturing centers—where workers had won major achievements through the mass industrial struggles of the 1930s—coincided with the rise of a financial aristocracy, which made far more money through speculation and criminality than in the production of anything of value.

According to the politicians of big business, nothing can be done that interferes with the profits of the ruling elite. That is why the working class must be organized as an independent force to conduct an industrial and political fight to break the stranglehold of the financial elite over society and reorganize economic life in the interests of the working class—the vast majority of the population.

The banks and basic industry must be transformed into publicly owned utilities—controlled not by a government of bought-and-paid politicians, but by a government of the workers, by the workers and for the workers. The auto industry must be nationalized under workers’ control in order to guarantee secure employment and safe and affordable transportation for all.

The capitalist system has failed. The worship of the “free market”—tax cuts for the rich, deregulation and an unrelenting attack on the interests of working people—has produced a disaster for humanity: mass unemployment, poverty and a return to conditions of exploitation not seen since the 1930s.

Economic life must be organized according to a rational plan, drawn up by those who produce society’s wealth, in order to satisfy human needs, not private profit. This is socialism.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on auto workers who see the necessity to begin this fight to contact us, study our program and help build the SEP as the new leadership of the working class.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact