

# Unite auto workers in Europe, North America and internationally against wage-cutting and layoffs!

Jerry White, SEP candidate for US president  
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In our election campaign, my running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I have made the fight for the international unity of the working class the first principle of our program. Workers in every country face a common struggle against the drive of transnational corporations to boost their profits by reducing workers to sweat shop conditions of poverty and exploitation.

Nowhere is the need for workers to adopt an international socialist strategy more evident than in the auto industry.

Three years ago, the Obama administration, taking advantage of the economic crisis triggered by Wall Street, imposed unprecedented concessions on General Motors and Chrysler workers. With the collaboration of the United Auto Workers union (UAW), Obama's Auto Task Force imposed a fifty percent wage cut on all new-hires and slashed health care and pension benefits. This enabled the Detroit Big Three auto companies to make a combined profit of nearly \$30 billion in 2011.

The imposition of poverty wages on American auto workers is now being used by the global auto giants to do the same to auto workers in Europe. Because of certain legal protections won through previous struggles, the European working class has not, until now, faced layoffs and wage cuts on the scale that has become commonplace in the US.

That is rapidly changing. In Greece, the international banks are imposing starvation on the working class, setting the stage for similar attacks on workers throughout Europe. Relying on the treachery of the European unions, Social Democrats, Stalinists and ex-left parties, the auto corporations are preparing American-style attacks against workers, particularly in

Germany, France and England.

General Motors has targeted workers in its European Opel and Vauxhall divisions and is currently in talks with PSA Peugeot-Citroën about a partnership that would lead to thousands of job cuts throughout the continent. "If Opel is going to get fixed, it is going to get fixed now and cuts are going to be deep," one GM official recently told the *Wall Street Journal*.

GM is threatening to close its factory in Bochum, Germany, which employs 3,100 workers, and another in Ellesmere Port, near Liverpool, England, which has 2,100 employees. This comes after the 2010 shutdown of the Opel plant in Antwerp, Belgium, at the cost of 2,500 jobs.

Peugeot, which previously announced plans to slash 6,000 jobs, is complaining that labor costs in France are more than three times higher than in Eastern Europe and other low-wage countries. A partnership with GM would be aimed at slashing workers' wages and benefits and imposing speedup.

UAW President Bob King has been put on Opel's supervisory board with the support of the German trade union IG Metall. King is an out-and-out tool of the auto bosses and Wall Street, who boasts that the UAW has abandoned any "20<sup>th</sup> century" ideas about fighting the corporations. He insists openly that the chief task of the unions is to boost profits by increasing productivity and helping management to lower labor costs.

In an op-ed piece in the February 24 *Detroit Free Press*, King praised Obama's "bold and decisive rescue" of GM and Chrysler. He touted the union's role in cutting wages and benefits and its agreement "to wave for six years our right to strike."

King's presence on the Opel supervisory board must

be taken as a warning: IG Metall is preparing to bring to Europe the same conditions that American workers confront. A deal is already reportedly in the making that would bring some production from Korea to German factories.

These developments show that the unions support the destruction of the wages and conditions of their own members. The interests of the union executives, well-off representatives of the upper-middle class, are directly opposed to those of the workers. Their support for wage-cutting flows from the unions' nationally-based character and their nationalist and pro-capitalist program.

In a globalized economy, where transnational corporations can shift production to regions with the cheapest labor, the unions abandon any attempt to improve the wages of their members and instead collaborate with the bosses in driving them down, in order to convince the companies to keep production "at home." They do so in an attempt to bolster their dues base, the main source of their bloated salaries.

The unions demand that workers line up with "their" employers in a fratricidal struggle against the workers of other countries to compete for jobs by accepting ever lower wages and ever more onerous working conditions. The catastrophic consequences of this policy for auto workers are becoming clearer with each passing day.

People like King and his counterparts in IG Metall are little more than labor contractors who get a cut of the profits sweated from the workers by guaranteeing cheap labor.

In opposition to this betrayal, my campaign fights for the unity of American workers with their brothers and sisters in Europe and around the world. We insist that all workers, no matter what country they live in, have a right to a secure and good-paying job. The fight to guarantee this social right pits the working class against the entire economic and political order--the capitalist system--which has failed the people of the world and is impoverishing the working class while enriching the corporate and financial elite.

I am running in order to build the leadership necessary to organize and unite the struggles of workers on an international and revolutionary socialist basis. This struggle for social equality requires the democratic ownership and control by the working class of the auto

industry and the banks.



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