

The struggle at Dundee Engine: A fight for all workers

Socialist Equality Party
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In voting down the local contract pushed by Chrysler and the UAW, workers at Dundee Engine are giving voice to the anger and opposition of auto workers throughout the country against the attack waged by the corporations, supported by the unions, and spearheaded by the Obama administration.

This act of defiance—including a 73 percent rejection vote—against corporate management and the well-paid union executives deserves the support of all sections of the working class. To succeed, it depends on the independent political mobilization of all auto workers against the relentless attack on wages and benefits.

In response, the union is resorting to its standard intimidation tactics, threatening that if the contract is not approved, the company will close its doors and move production elsewhere.

Workers everywhere have a stake in this fight. We urge Dundee workers to take your fight to all auto workers! Send delegations to other Chrysler plants as well as Ford, GM and the auto suppliers.

What are the issues at stake?

* **Forced overtime.** At Dundee Engine the company has used the term “critical status” to institute forced overtime at 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, indefinitely. Workers have complained to the union that they have not been allowed to see the national contract, which is believed to have restrictions on such brutal conditions. As one worker said, with the local agreement “they can work you a hard as they can.”

* **An international drive to the bottom.** Chrysler/Fiat Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne has boasted that union-management relations are better in the US and that he has a “flexible” and “cheaper” workforce. He has also imposed 10-hour work days and threatened workers in Italy that he will close their plants and bring production to the US if they do not accept the new production standards.

Two-tier wages. The auto plants are being turned*into modern day sweatshops. More than 50 percent of the workers at Dundee are new hires at the second-tier wage rate. Chrysler has the highest percentage of second-tier workers of the Big Three, and the lowest labor costs.

These conditions are an integral part of the Obama administration’s industrial policy. Obama insisted on two-tier wages as a part of the auto bailout in 2009. Now the administration is campaigning for “in-sourcing,” or forcing workers to compete internationally at lower and lower pay.

This anti-working class policy has been hailed by the UAW and the AFL-CIO. Last year UAW Vice President Joe Ashton said the union would “love to see” 40 percent of GM’s workforce paid tier-two wages by the end of the contract. “That would mean we were adding new jobs,” Ashton declared.

The well-paid union executives have responded to the economic crisis by moving even closer to the corporations, promoting nationalism, and actively suppressing struggles. The UAW owns 55 percent of the shares of Chrysler and sits on its board of directors. It is a business. In fact, UAW President Bob King was recently sent to Europe by the auto industry to show the unions there how the UAW collaborates with the company for lower wages.

Workers at Dundee face not just one company at one plant, but a coordinated offensive of the corporate elite, assisted by the unions, to attack workers throughout the United States and internationally. The working class must respond by mobilizing its independent strength on a world scale.

In Joliet, Illinois, for example, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) succeeded in pushing through a concessions contract last week after a bitter four-month strike against Caterpillar, a company that was highly profitable. Corporate management demanded that

workers take a six-year pay freeze and massive cuts in health care benefits.

The strike was deliberately isolated by the IAM, which refused to call out other locals even though the global company is seeking to impose similar conditions on its international workforce. The UAW, which represents many workers at Caterpillar, assisted the company by ordering their members to handle the parts produced by the scabs who replaced the striking workers.

Meanwhile, last week, 34 miners were gunned down in South Africa when they went on strike against intolerable working conditions. The workers were members of a dissident union that has come into conflict with the official National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The NUM is closely aligned with the African National Congress government and blamed workers for the massacre. As in South Africa, the unions in the US see any opposition to the corporations as a serious danger that must be suppressed.

A successful struggle depends on the formation of new organizations—independent rank-and-file committees that reject the subordination of the interests of workers to the profit dictates of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

The fight to defend the interests of the working class is above all a political struggle, directed against the two big business parties and the capitalist system they defend. While the UAW and the AFL-CIO are supporting Obama and claim he speaks for the interest of working people, the experience of the last four years has shown that there is no fundamental difference between the two big business party candidates.

The working class needs its own political party, based on a socialist perspective, including the nationalization of the major corporations under democratic control and the seizure of the ill-gotten wealth of the financial oligarchy. This will be a critical step in the reorganization of economic life based on the fulfillment of social needs, not private profit.



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