

Build rank-and-file committees to defend VW workers

Reject UAW-Volkswagen company union

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)

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The Socialist Equality Party calls on Volkswagen workers in Chattanooga, Tennessee to reject the attempt by VW management and the United Auto Workers to install a company union at the plant. The interests of workers—and the fight for better wages and working conditions—will not be advanced an inch if the UAW is brought into the plant.

Workers need an organization to unite them against multinational corporations and the big business politicians, which serve them. But the UAW is not an organization of struggle. It long ago abandoned any connection to the militant traditions of the past. In place of working class solidarity the UAW is dedicated to solidarity with the auto corporations in their international campaign of cost cutting.

Rather than uniting workers, the UAW works with management to divide workers. In the factories, the UAW pits “first tier” workers against “second tier” workers, forcing them to do the same work for lower wages. It sets workers in one factory against those in others, and makes workers in the US compete against their class brothers in other countries to see who will work for the lowest wages and worst conditions.

On this basis, the UAW has surrendered all of the gains workers wrested from the auto bosses over generations of struggle. Today a second tier worker in Detroit is making less in real terms than his great-grandfather did in 1914.

In an earlier period, when the UAW actually defended workers, its efforts to unionize factories ran up against the determined and often violent resistance of corporate management and government officials. Today, VW management is essentially inviting the UAW into the Chattanooga plant because it knows which side it is on. The UAW has not only played an

indispensable role in enforcing the poverty level wages in the US, but, along with its German counterparts in the IG Metall union it has actively collaborated in slashing wages and cutting jobs in European factories.

The UAW has made it clear that it rejects any struggle to improve the wages and conditions of VW workers at the Tennessee plant. Instead, UAW President Bob King and Region 8 Director Gary Gasteel have pledged that the UAW “is no longer confrontational” and will do everything to boost the productivity and profits of the company. They have pledged to bring VW the same “success” as the Detroit automakers, which today are making record profits based on drastic wage cutting and speedup.

Under terms of the Obama administration’s 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler, the UAW agreed to a 50 percent cut in the wages for new hires and the abolishing of the eight-hour day with the imposition of the so-called Alternative Work Schedule. Workers at many plants now labor for 10 hours at straight time and without paid lunch breaks. As a result the UAW has reduced labor costs for the Detroit automakers by 27 percent over the last six years.

This is in line with Obama’s policy of “in-sourcing,” that is, the lowering of labor costs in the US to persuade companies, currently operating in Mexico and China, to shift production back to the US. If brought into the Chattanooga plant, the UAW will continue to function as a cheap labor contractor, enforcing management’s dictates in exchange for a share of the profits earned by the auto companies.

The UAW is not concerned with defending VW workers, but only with getting millions more in union dues to boost the salaries of the business executives who run the organization. As a reward for overseeing

the ripping up of the wages, benefits and work standards, the Detroit auto companies gave a union-controlled trust billions in corporate stocks. The UAW already has assets of more than \$1 billion and more than 400 UAW officials earn salaries and expenses in excess of \$100,000 per year. UAW President Bob King tops the list at over \$153,000 in salary alone.

Unable to win any votes at Asian or European transplants, the UAW is working with VW to set up a works council along the lines of the “co-determination” schemes in Germany, which, by law, must represent the interest of management, not the workers. Such organizations would be considered “company unions” and illegal under US labor law, however, without the presence of a nominally “independent” union.

Earlier generations understood workers could not stand up to the corporations and the government alone. Workers need organization, but fighting organizations independent of management and the government, not pro-company puppets.

The SEP calls for the building of a rank-and-file committee, democratically elected by factory workers and answerable to them alone, to launch a genuine struggle for decent wages, jobs and safe and healthy working conditions. These committees must be the independent democratic voice of Volkswagen workers, excluding management, UAW officials and the politicians of both big business parties.

The organization of a such a struggle requires the elaboration of definite policies and a program, which correspond to the problems confronting workers not only at VW but throughout the United States and, in fact, the world.

Today, transnational corporations like GM, VW and Toyota scour the globe for the cheapest labor. Workers, wherever they live, have common interests. American workers must unite with their brothers and sisters overseas, including VW workers in Germany, in a common fight in defense of jobs and decent living standards.

The unions have long tied workers to the Democratic Party, claiming it represents working people. The last five years of the Obama administration, from the bailout of the Wall Street banks to the slashing of food stamps and jobless benefits, to the cutting of wages and increasing of health care costs, have shown once again that the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are

the representatives of big business.

That is why the struggle for the industrial organization of the working class must be tied to the building of an independent political party to fight for a workers government to end the dictatorship of the banks and corporations over society.

Workers face a struggle not just against one employer but the entire economic and political system—capitalism—that enriches a tiny handful through the impoverishment and exploitation of the vast majority. Today, social inequality is worse than ever, with 85 billionaires controlling more wealth than the bottom 3.5 billion people on the planet.

The irrational system must be ended and capitalism replaced with socialism. Economic and political life must be reorganized in the interests of the working class, which produces the wealth, not the bankers and millionaire corporate executives. This includes the placing of the auto industry under the democratic public ownership and control of the working class.

Nothing was ever won by the working class without struggle. VW workers need a leadership and organization. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* will do everything to assist VW workers in this fight. Contact us.



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