

A reply to redbaiting by the general counsel of the Detroit AFL-CIO

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In recent weeks, the *World Socialist Web Site's Autoworker Newsletter* has gathered a wide following among autoworkers across the United States. By helping autoworkers break through the UAW-company wall of secrecy, the *Autoworker Newsletter* has become the autoworkers' authoritative source of information and political analysis. Its articles are shared, read, and discussed by thousands of autoworkers each day.

Last week's "no" vote at Fiat Chrysler (FCA) points to a growing intersection between the sentiments of broad layers of autoworkers and the program of working class political independence advocated by the *Autoworker Newsletter*. The UAW has been unable to respond to this, and is enraged that social media has facilitated the WSW's efforts to unmask the UAW's secret dealings with the company.

Instead of attempting to respond politically to the *Autoworker Newsletter*, the UAW has launched an anti-socialist campaign aimed at blaming "outside groups" for "stirring up" sentiment against the UAW, in the words of UAW President Dennis Williams. Since this has had no effect on the workers, the UAW has called on the services of a mouthpiece—the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO's lead counsel Bruce Miller of the law firm Miller Cohen PLC—to do their arguing for them.

In an October 1 statement on corporate letterhead titled, "Rejection of FCA collective bargaining agreement is UAW democracy in action," the 87-year-old lawyer has launched a dishonest and desperate attack against the WSW and the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

Miller denounces "outsider vultures" for opposing "an historic collective bargaining agreement" that included "significant wage increases across the board, narrowed the gap between tiered pay scales and introduced an innovating health plan to improve services and cut down employee and corporate costs. It was a good settlement."

According to Miller, opposition to the contract is the fault of "the vultures on the left dressed in red garb who preach their love for the workers while they advocate on behalf of the enemies of working people."

"A case in point is *World Socialist Web Site*... which accuses the UAW of selling out its members with the contract settlement. How the union leadership sells out its members by providing for the membership to vote on the settlement and reject or accept it is not explained."

If Mr. Miller needs an explanation about how the UAW sells out the workers, let us give it to him—it shouldn't be too difficult.

First, the UAW conducts negotiations with the company entirely in secret, keeping workers in the dark. This is done to cover up the fact that the negotiations are non-adversarial. All the UAW cares about is maintaining a stream of income for the bureaucrats at Solidarity House, and it could care less how the company proposes to attack the workers.

The UAW then provides workers with bogus "highlights" which present a false, sugarcoated picture of the contract. Next, it schedules "information sessions" where the UAW applies more lipstick to the pig. After that, it forces workers to vote under duress without giving them time to read the contract. If the vote is close enough to fudge, as workers allege it was at Warren Truck, then the UAW might engage in fraud.

Miller has been a lawyer for more than half a century and knows quite well that a lawyer would never advise a client to sign a contract until they have scrutinized it line by line. This rings all the more true for a contract spanning four years. And any first-year law student knows that the process by which the contract was presented violates the most elementary precepts of an honest contract. Under contract law, when a party is forced to agree under severe economic duress, such a contract is voidable.

Furthermore, Miller praises the contract for its "significant wage increases" and inclusion of "an innovating health plan to improve services and cut down employee and corporate costs." But what are the facts?

The paltry wage increases, spread out over eight years, barely keep pace with inflation. Miller knows that no lawyer would advise a client to sign a contract where promises are made outside the length of the agreement, as is the case with second tier wage increases. The wage structure keeps intact the tiered wage system and creates even more levels of pay. That Miller praises such a deal as "historic" can only be construed as malpractice, bad faith, and a violation of the rules of professional conduct.

Regarding health care, the UAW and the company have provided zero details to workers. Miller claims the health plan will cut both employee and corporate costs, but does Mr. Miller expect the money to be grown on trees? Once again, any attorney knows that an argument has to be based on the facts, and Miller provides none. This is in line with the UAW's silence on the details of the health plan, which will in reality allow the UAW to raise copays and premiums on workers and gamble their money on the stock market while cutting costs for the company.

Workers can judge for themselves whether the UAW has sold out its members or whether this is simply a wild "accusation" of the WSW. In deliberating, the workers can consider 35 years of UAW betrayals and concessions as evidence, including "exhibit A": last week's proposed contract. In fact, the jury has already spoken. Sixty-five percent of Chrysler workers found the UAW guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Workers also take issue with Miller's claim that last week's vote represents "UAW democracy in action."

Aside from the anti-democratic methods listed above, UAW officials also called police on supporters of the *Autoworker Newsletter*, threatened other supporters of the WSW, and shouted down workers at informational meetings across the country. One worker told the WSW that UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell yelled at him to "F--- off." When votes were tallied, many workers accused the UAW of fraud.

Such is "UAW democracy in action."

Unable to support his baseless claims against the WSW, Miller resorts in a degrading manner to the last weapon of every political scoundrel—anti-communist red-baiting.

Here, Miller attacks the WSW for having "their own agenda," and for "advocating on behalf of enemies of working people."

The *World Socialist Web Site* is proud to call itself socialist, and it has made its demands crystal clear. We call for an abolition of the tiered system, an end to Alternative Work Schedule, 30 percent pay increase

with COLA, and restoration of full health care and pension benefits. Mr. Miller does not explain how this can be defined as aiding the “enemies of working people.” The claim is a lie that Miller could not defend in court.

The agenda of the WSWs and *Autoworker Newsletter* is out in the open for all to see. It advocates for the replacement of the capitalist system with a socialist system in which the fruits of workers’ labor are returned to them. Such a society would be organized not in the interests of the privileged few, but in the interests of billions who work for a living. The WSWs believes there is something fundamentally wrong with a society in which a CEO like Sergio Marchionne can make \$72 million a year while autoworkers struggle to pay rent, put food on the table for their children, and fill their old cars with gas.

Mr. Miller, Esq. may see nothing wrong with this, but we do. On the charge of seeking to change the system and abolish poverty, war, and suffering, the WSWs pleads “guilty.”

Speaking of hidden agendas, on whose behalf does Miller speak?

He states in his letter: “In the approximately 54 years I have practiced labor law and been an observer and participant in the life of the UAW I have seen major changes in the auto industry. You can’t go through the threat of extinction, bankruptcies, and major changes in how cars are made without those changes complicating collective bargaining.”

Of course, Mr. Miller has accumulated plenty of billable hours in the course of over 50 years of service to the AFL-CIO. He has been present as the UAW has been transformed into an agent of the corporations. Being an attorney is a lucrative profession, and workers would be interested to know if Miller was paid to craft this two-page letter denouncing the WSWs. If so, how much? Was he paid with workers’ dues money?

Miller is also a leader of the Democratic Party, one of the two parties controlled by Wall Street and beholden to the auto companies. He is a former Chairman of the Wayne County Democratic Party; a Treasurer, Precinct Delegate and Officer at Large for the Michigan Democratic Party; and a member of the Rules Committee for the National Democratic Convention. According to the web site Opensecrets.org, Fiat Chrysler has donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Democratic Party in recent years.

But Miller’s letter admits none of this. In order to hide his hidden agenda, Miller deepens his anti-communist diatribe against the *World Socialist Web Site*:

“Who are these ‘friends’ of the auto workers? To give it a flavor, they devote their publication to the murder of Leon Trotsky, a side kick of V. I. Lenin. This is what they say: ‘The assassination of the greatest leader of the 1917 October Revolution marked the climax of the Stalinist regime’s eradication of the socialist workers and intellectuals who had secured the victory of the Bolshevik revolution.’ Just what the workers at FCA need—a new Bolshevik revolution and a leader like the Russian Leon Trotsky! These folks want to see turmoil in the UAW because it is out of turmoil they hope a new revolution will come. And when that revolution comes these folks will lead everyone to the socialist paradise that was the Soviet Union when Lenin and Trotsky were around. FCA workers need this like a hole in the head!”

This type of anti-socialist red baiting has always been a tool of the enemies of the working class. In 1937, GM denounced the sit-down strikers as “outside agitators” working as part of a “vast conspiracy to destroy all for which life is worth living.” In fact, the great workers’ rebellions of the 1930s—the Minneapolis truckers general strike in 1934, the Toledo Auto-Lite Strike in 1934, and the Flint sit-down strikes of 1936-37—were led by Trotskyist revolutionaries. In Flint, it was the Trotskyist autoworker Kermit Johnson who orchestrated the occupation of Chevy No. 4 alongside his wife, Genora Johnson, who led the Women’s Auxiliary.

Since Mr. Miller raised the question of Leon Trotsky, let us make clear who he was.

Leon Trotsky was co-leader of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and gave political direction to the workers as they seized power from the brutal Tsar. He was murdered in 1940 by a Stalinist bureaucracy which had betrayed the working class and the principles of the October Revolution. Trotsky paid with his life for his relentless defense of the international unity of the working class. Before he was killed, Trotsky founded the Fourth International to carry forward the principles embodied in the Russian Revolution.

Despite Miller’s appeals to ignorance, the Russian Revolution played an enormous role in the political education of the American working class. In fact, without the Russian Revolution, there would not be industrial unions in the US. Millions of American workers were radicalized by the events of 1917 and fought pitched battles against the corporations and their stooges in the old American Federation of Labor, a right-wing union bureaucracy which refused to organize unskilled workers.

Miller knows something about this history. When he was a young man and before he sold out all his principles, he joined the socialist movement. According to an interview he gave in 2014 to Wayne State Law School, Miller joined a faction of the socialist movement in the early 1940s which was led by Max Shachtman, who had broken with Trotsky in 1940 but who at that time still proclaimed his allegiance to Trotskyism.

In 1954, in the midst of the McCarthy anti-communist witch-hunt, Miller was initially denied admission to the Michigan Bar Association on account of his politics, which he refused to denounce. The aging lawyer had a right to be proud of that element of his life. But today, he lowers himself to use the same tactics that were once used against him by the right-wing enemies of the working class.

Bruce Miller has come a long way since he was a young man. He has made his peace with the establishment and has been handsomely rewarded for it. But this does not give him the license to slander those who have not—and will not—sell out.

We encourage workers interested in finding out more about Trotsky and socialism to listen to the October 3 online interview with WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North, “Why and How the GPU Murdered Leon Trotsky.” The second part of the interview will take place on October 10. To register, visit wsws.org/trotsky.



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