

Toyota worker denounces union over shutdown of Australian car industry

Our reporter
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The *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party are fighting to develop a struggle by car workers at Toyota's Altona plant in Melbourne, Australia, against the company's plans to end all production at the end of 2017 and destroy over 2,000 jobs.

The closure by Toyota is part of the shutdown of the entire Australian auto industry. The two other car manufacturers, Ford and General Motors Holden (GMH), are planning to end production in October 2016 and December 2017 respectively. The flow-on impact on parts suppliers, other related companies and service industries, is predicted to result in job losses of between 150,000 and 200,000 across Australia.

The unions that claim to represent car workers, particularly the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), are openly collaborating with the companies to ensure they can carry out the "orderly closure" of their operations, at the expense of the working class. The closures are being supported by the Coalition government as well as the opposition Labor Party and Greens.

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters have distributed hundreds of copies of the SEP statement, "Oppose the destruction of the car industry in Australia! Launch a struggle in defence of jobs!" to workers at the Altona plant. They have also circulated *World Socialist Web Site* articles on the issues that face American auto workers in their contract struggle against auto conglomerates and the thoroughly pro-company United Auto Workers (UAW) union.

Against the claim of the Australian unions, the government and the mass media that "nothing can be done" to stop the plant closures, the SEP has explained that an internationalist and socialist perspective provides the way forward to defend jobs and all the interests of the working class.

Important discussions are now developing. A worker in his early 30s gave the following interview to the WSWWS, documenting his experiences, the conditions inside the plant, and his thoughts about the SEP's program and the international economic and political context of the assault on the conditions of the working class. The workers' name has been withheld due to the possibility of company-union victimisation.

"When the company announced it was closing," the worker explained, "the union didn't do anything. They could have gone on strike. They could have fought to keep it open. The only people who will win out from this closure are the company and the unions. The union officials will be well looked after. There is no question that they'll be getting money in the pocket for not putting up a fight against this. They're supposed to be our voice, but they've sewn up their mouth."

"There's going to be up to 200,000 people out of work from this," he continued. "How is 'retraining' going to help at all? I read an article earlier today that there are 700,000 people unemployed already, let alone another 200,000. The training is just a certificate that will do nothing."

The worker pointed out that the union had agreed that Toyota could permanently retain workers on temporary contracts. "A fixed-term contract goes for six months. When I started in 2011, they were only allowed to have workers for two of those contracts, and then they would have to either hire them [on permanent conditions] or they would go. That was part of the agreement."

"The company and the union changed the agreement ... now they just keep people on as temporaries indefinitely. They get paid \$6 less than full-timers. They get \$25 or so per hour, and the full-timers get about \$31. They do exactly the same work: no more, and no less responsibility."

The worker outlined his attitude to the call by the WSWS and SEP for a unified struggle of autoworkers, in Australia, the United States, Europe and Asia, against the international strategy of the companies, and aimed at the fight for workers' governments.

"That's what we need! That way we can fight," he replied. "I think I've heard that in Australia we're the highest paid workers for Toyota. That's what they want to get rid of. But we get peanuts. If I don't work overtime, I only clear \$760 a week. I've got a family with one son. Most of the people I work with have families and mortgages. Paying the mortgage is around \$400 a week. That's more than half my wage. Then you have to pay for bills, food, and petrol just to get your car to work. We're slaves.

"The way the world is now, the rich just get richer. There's no such thing as a 'middle class' anymore. You've got money or you don't, it's as simple as that. They've made it that way."

Commenting on the introduction of a second-tier workforce among US autoworkers, he added: "The way we're going, it's Australian workers who will be working for \$14 an hour!"

"Most of my adult life," he continued, "I've been voting for the Labor Party, thinking they're the ones who help the working class. Now I've come to realise that these two parties [Liberal and Labor] are two sides of the same board. I've realised this—slowly, slowly. People are waking up to it, but it still hasn't reached mass awareness yet."

The worker contrasted the attitude of the Australian political establishment toward unemployed workers, who are made to work for poverty-level unemployment benefits, with the virtually unlimited funds made available for military spending.

"It's shocking," he said. "They're spending absolutely billions of dollars on war. With the amount the world has spent on war they could have cured homelessness and hunger ten-fold, no question.

"Why are they even in the Middle East? It's for oil. You see what happened in Paris recently. Those groups were funded by the Americans because they want to get rid of Assad. A few months ago, France was supporting them. It's a love-hate relationship. When they need them, they're friends, and when they don't need them, they're terrorists. I've got friends here who are Muslims. What's going on in the media here now is

making people hate Muslims in general. They are propagandising that all Muslims are terrorists."

"Now they're using it," he said. "Whenever there's a big crisis shown on television, you know there's a catch," he said. "We've already lost all our privacy on the Internet. There's even a building in Australia, in Alice Springs, called Pine Gap, which is run by the American CIA and NSA.

"You guys are socialists, right?" the worker said. "That's great. I'm all for socialism. A lot of people are scared of it, but I'm all for it. The top one percent is swimming in wealth. They have half the wealth of the world and the rest of us have nothing."

The WSWS and SEP encourages other car workers and workers in other industries to contact us and take part in developing the broadest debate in the working class on how to politically fight the assault on its jobs, social conditions and democratic rights.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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