

“If the Internet shuts down, we wouldn’t know anything. The union isn’t going to tell us”

Autoworkers in Detroit support campaign against Google Internet censorship

A WSWS reporting team
9 September 2017

Socialist Equality Party supporters collected scores of signatures last weekend from workers in the Detroit area for the petition demanding tech giant Google stop its censorship of Internet search results. An investigation by the *World Socialist Web Site* has revealed that the company has changed its search algorithm to block results from the WSWS and other anti-war and progressive web sites.

Auto workers at the Dearborn Assembly Plant, part of the Ford Rouge complex outside of Detroit, gave strong support to an SEP campaign team led by WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White. The team circulated the Open Letter from David North, WSWS International Editorial Board chairperson, to the directors of Google.

“Google is wrong,” declared a Ford worker with 22 years seniority when he first heard about the search engine’s political censorship. Receiving and reading a copy of the open letter, he continued, “That is why we have the Constitution and freedom of speech.”

“We have the right to voice our opinion, and find whatever information we need on the Internet.” Many workers shared his sentiments.

Several workers recalled an incident during the 2015 contract struggle when the United Auto Workers sent goons to physically remove White and another WSWS reporter from a press conference called by UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmie Settles to force through a sell-out deal.

The UAW’s attempt at censorship of the WSWS is being replicated at a much higher level by Google, which in April changed its search algorithm to make the WSWS disappear from political searches. For

example, the search term “UAW” typed into Google today will not bring up one single article from the extensive coverage by WSWS reporters on the recent indictment of high-level officials of Fiat Chrysler and the UAW on corruption charges.

By contrast, just last March, before the new censorship protocol was implemented, the same search term would have produced several articles from the WSWS exposing corruption, pro-company policies and sexual misconduct on the part of the UAW on Google’s first page of search results.

Many workers thanked the SEP supporters for distributing the Open Letter. “I am glad you are out here,” said a young female auto worker who had achieved “entry level status” at \$21.50 per hour pay scale after several years on the job. Full seniority workers receive as much as \$35 per hour and full benefits. She explained that the recent contract allowed the company to introduce additional pay scales below hers.

“Independent contractors receive differing levels of reduced pay. Then there are TPT [temporary part time] workers who work part time for only three days a week and LTS [long term supplemental] workers who work a full week but at the reduced rate of \$15.87 with cuts to both medical benefits and retirement pay.

“If you weren’t out here, how would we know?” she continued. “We wouldn’t. If the Internet shuts down, we wouldn’t know anything. The union isn’t going to tell us. I think what they are doing is terrible.”

A part time contractor doing quality control said, “The union has been part of the company for years.

I'm working two and three days a week making \$17.50 an hour. A full-time worker with seniority doing the same job makes \$35 per hour for 40 hours."

She was particularly angered by the massive bonuses and stock options handed out to top management. "If they can give the CEO all those millions," she said, "the workers should be entitled to some money."

Another worker said, "This is a First Amendment issue. No matter who you are, it's your right to publish your views without Google censoring you."

A third added, "The Internet is supposed to be open. This isn't going to stand."

"What Google is doing is not right. It's a matter of freedom of speech."

An SEP campaign team also collected signatures at the annual Labor Day parade in downtown Detroit on Monday.

A number of young, highly exploited, auto parts workers stopped to sign. One young worker told the WSWS, "I don't like Google telling me what news I can read," as he signed the petition. He said he appreciated the fact that the WSWS was interested in reporting the conditions faced by young workers such as him and expressed interest in becoming a regular reader.

Many workers referred to the UAW corruption scandal. "I am not surprised," said a Chrysler worker.

A General Motors worker from the Detroit-Hamtramck plant signed the petition. She indicated she appreciated the campaign waged by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* against the layoffs last spring carried out at her facility.

Another SEP campaign team in downtown Detroit won support for the petition opposing Google censorship at the Detroit Jazz Festival. Among those signing was a young worker employed in the tech industry who said he was shocked to hear that Google was manipulating its search results. "The internet is supposed to be a free forum of ideas," he said. "I want to get your newsletter."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact