

"They want you to feel if you speak up you'll be called a traitor or a Russian."

Detroit autoworkers denounce effort to censor the Internet

A reporting team
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Autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler's Warren Stamping Plant in suburban Detroit condemned the campaign to censor the Internet by the US government and tech giants like Google and Facebook.

Workers commented Thursday afternoon during their shift change as they stopped to speak with Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners building support for the upcoming meetings, "Organizing Resistance to Internet Censorship," sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), the SEP and the International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE). The first meeting in Detroit will be held at Wayne State University on Tuesday, March 27, followed by a Midwest regional meeting at the university on Sunday, April 22.

Campaigners passed out leaflets and used a bullhorn to explain that the ruling class was trying to dictate to workers what news sources they were allowed to read and which ones they were not. Under the guise of fighting "fake news" and "Russian meddling," the campaigners explained, the Democratic Party in particular was trying to crack down on social media to block workers from organizing opposition to social inequality, plummeting living standards and the danger of war.

Many workers gave thumbs up as they passed by and made comments like, "We have First Amendment rights!" and, "We agree with you!" Several workers, young and old, black and white, posed for photographs holding signs for the meetings to oppose censorship.

"I think censorship is horrendous," Preston, a veteran Warren Stamping worker who stopped by the WSWS

campaign table, said. "The Internet is a free press, and it makes them afraid."

"Everything is being blamed on a conspiracy by Russia. The Democrats and Republicans have a devious plan to suppress freedom of the press. They want to make you feel that if you speak up you will be called a traitor or a Russian."

Remarking on the growth of social inequality, he added, "If you earn in the top 2 percent of the economy you are inside the fraternity whether you are a Republican or Democrat."

Another worker said he is a regular reader of the WSWS and was opposed to the efforts of Google to blacklist the WSWS and other anti-war, socialist and progressive websites. "I'm concerned about the war in Syria and what would happen if the US clashed with the Russians. It could mean world war. I read your site regularly and distribute articles on the lunch tables inside the plant."

Asked about Facebook's plans to promote "authoritative news sources," like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, which boosted lies about weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion of Iraq 15 years ago, the worker said, "I wouldn't listen to those newspapers if they gave me a weather report."

Like the saying goes, he added, "Truth is the first casualty of war."

Campaigners explained that the ruling class was trying to stifle free speech on the Internet because of the growth of the class struggle in the United States and around the world. Teachers in West Virginia, campaigners explained, had used Facebook and other

social media to break the grip of the corrupt unions and wage a nine-day strike earlier this month. In 2015, autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler also used social media to circulate articles from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to defeat the sellout agreement pushed by the UAW.

A worker taking a newsletter responded to the fact that teachers used Facebook to continue their strike in defiance of the union's first back-to-work order. "That's why I keep telling people here: we need to unionize against the union."

A campaigner pointed out that the UAW was one of the first to use the term "fake news," when it attacked the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* for exposing the 2015 sellout contract and assisting Fiat Chrysler workers to initially defeat it by a 2-to-1 margin—the first time a UAW-backed national contract had been rejected in three decades. The same union bureaucrats who were denouncing the *WSWS* were now caught up in the UAW corruption scandal, which revealed that Fiat Chrysler executives paid \$1.5 million in bribes to UAW officials to sign company-friendly labor agreements.

Referring to the UAW, a worker said, "I hope they all go down. I'm sick of the union working against us."

Illustrating this point, one passerby who appeared to be a UAW official tried, but failed, to persuade other workers not to take the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, saying it was "propaganda." He walked away in disgust as workers continued to take newsletters and stop and talk to campaigners.

The overwhelming majority of workers responded to the media's argument that opposition in the American working class is a result of Russian interference with a combination of ridicule and anger. "They need a bogeyman!" one worker commented. "Now they're trying to shut Facebook down too!"

Speaking to several workers, a campaigner noted that the day before was the 15th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, which was based on the greatest "fake news" story of all, "weapons of mass destruction."

One worker responded, "There's a reason you can't pay too much attention to the media and the TV. A lot of what they say is untrue. That's why you have to do your own research online."

The *WSWS* reporter replied that this was precisely what the corporations and Democratic Party did not

want workers to do. "There will always be guys, like you guys, who are going to keep pushing against it," he said.

A veteran worker said, "The government has been lying to us for a long time; that's why people go to the Internet to get alternative news sources. I don't like them trying to censor the Internet."

Another worker, who hired into Chrysler in the mid-1990s, said, "The ones who control everything are a small minority and they are afraid if they can't control the message people will turn on them. The rich don't only have the money, they have the means to influence people. They use censorship and misinformation. But when the truth gets out people start paying attention."

Told about the meetings in Detroit sponsored by the *WSWS* and SEP to organize resistance to censorship, he said, "I'm for what you are doing, getting the message out, and I'll join the fight."

Jared, a young worker at Warren Stamping, also stopped to speak with the *WSWS* campaign team.

Speaking about the politicians pushing for censorship of the Internet, he remarked,

"They are slaves to the corporations, not the people. By pushing for the elimination of net neutrality they are making it so companies like Comcast and the cable companies can make more money at our expense. They are pushing really hard for that."

He said the Internet was a valuable resource for workers. "It makes access to a wide range of views possible for millions of people."



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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