

In wake of GM closure announcement, UAW and Democrats stoke nationalism

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The devastating announcement last week that General Motors will eliminate more than 14,000 jobs and close five auto factories in the US and Canada has sent shockwaves among workers. The callous decision by GM to restructure in the name of boosting its profits on the backs of workers and communities is another brutal demonstration of the consequences of the subordination of economic life to the capitalist market.

As for the United Auto Workers in the United States and Unifor in Canada, the “opposition” expressed by union officials to the GM plant closings is entirely false and hypocritical. The auto unions have spent decades suppressing every struggle by workers while overseeing the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

As is their stock-in-trade, the UAW and Unifor have responded to GM’s attack on jobs with the promotion of virulent nationalism in order to throw dust in the eyes of workers in an attempt to divert and derail opposition.

The attempt to inject workers with the poison of nationalism is a deliberate effort by the unions to divide workers in North America from their working-class brothers overseas and prevent a unified struggle in defense of jobs. Further, it is aimed at covering up the bankruptcy and failure of the capitalist profit system, which subordinates every facet of economic and social life to the mad pursuit of profit by the corporate elite.

The UAW has made common cause with the viciously anti-working-class Trump administration on the basis of support for “America First” nationalism, embracing the threat by Trump to impose 25 percent tariffs on autos imported into the US. The idea that the billionaire con man Trump has anything to offer workers is ludicrous if not obscene. From threats to shoot down protesting migrant workers to massive corporate tax cuts and campaign proposals that auto companies reduce costs by shifting production to lower-wage areas of the US, this administration has marked itself as a deadly enemy of workers everywhere.

In this light it is not surprising then that in a statement issued following GM’s plant closure announcement, UAW

Vice President for GM Terry Dittes did not even mention the threat by GM to close its factory in Oshawa, Ontario with the loss of 2,300 jobs, implicitly rejecting any solidarity with Canadian workers.

Railing against workers beyond the US borders Dittes declared, “This callous decision by GM to reduce or cease operations in American plants, while opening or increasing production in Mexico and China plants for sales to American consumers, is, in its implementation, profoundly damaging to our American workforce.”

He continued, “The UAW and our members will confront this decision by GM through every legal, contractual, and collective bargaining avenue open to our membership.”

The claim that the UAW will address the plant closings through “collective bargaining” is a warning that union officials will use the plant closures as a bludgeon to beat back demands by workers for the restoration of concessions and, in fact, push for even further cuts. The bitter experience of decades has demonstrated that the endless offering of concessions has only whetted corporate appetites, leading to calls for ever greater sacrifice while failing to halt a single plant closing.

Meanwhile, north of the US border, Jerry Dias, president of Unifor, advanced Canadian nationalism, saying that he would urge Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to impose tariffs of up to 40 percent on any vehicles General Motors might try to import to Canada from its plants in Mexico, a provocative move that would further fuel the fires of trade war.

In the wake of the GM closing announcements, a layer of Democratic Party officials with ties to the UAW bureaucracy have also issued statements feigning sympathy with GM workers while stoking animosity toward workers in China and Mexico.

Workers would do well to recall that it was the Democratic Obama administration that carried through the 2009 forced bankruptcy and restructuring of the auto industry on the backs of workers in which tens of thousands of jobs were destroyed. Indeed, writing in an op-ed piece in the *New York*

Times last week, Steven Rattner, the former head of President Obama's Auto Task Force, called GM's new job cut threat, "a rational response" to competitive pressures.

This did not stop US Democratic Congresswoman Debbie Dingell from Michigan's 12th District, a former GM executive who has pocketed thousands if not millions in GM campaign contributions, from striking a mock pose of defiance, declaring, "We need to, as a Congress, be addressing public policy issues that keep manufacturing in this country."

She continued, "They moved a Blazer plant from the United States of America to Mexico, and very few people screamed about it or paid attention to it."

Dingell said she would oppose President Trump's proposed revisions to the North American Free Trade Agreement unless it ensures "that we're not moving jobs to Mexico."

Another Democrat, Haley Stevens, was recently elected to the US House of Representatives in Michigan's 11th Congressional District, after boasting that she was the chief of staff of Obama's Auto Task Force, the gang of Wall Street financiers who halved the wages of new hires in the name of making US auto companies "internationally competitive."

Meanwhile, Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio reported that he had gotten the backing of Trump for his "American Cars, American Jobs Act" that, among other things, provides customers with a \$3,500 price deduction on the purchase or lease of an American-made car, in effect a direct subsidy to the auto companies.

The attempt to foster conflict and hatred between workers in the US, Canada, Mexico, China and around the world is a game of divide and rule that has been played many times before and workers should have none of it. The question that is posed is a common fight to defend all jobs and unify workers in a powerful struggle across national boundaries against the transnational auto giants.

The assault on jobs is global. In addition to its plans to close plants in North America, GM announced earlier this year plans to close a factory in Gunsan, South Korea, affecting more than 2,000 workers, with a wage freeze and other cuts imposed on the remaining workforce in collaboration with the unions. GM, which has previously closed plants in Russia, Australia and India and Europe, will soon announce two more international plant closures.

Workers all over the world have responded to the deepening attacks by the transnational auto giants with an expanding number of strikes. Last December, 1,000 Ford workers in Romania launched a courageous wildcat walkout against a rotten pay deal freezing wages and cutting pay for new hires accepted by their union.

In July, 600 Goodyear workers in San Luis Potosí, Mexico struck against poverty wages of about US\$2 an hour. Meanwhile, in India, 3,000 autoworkers in Chennai, known as the "Detroit of India," recently carried out strikes, protests and occupations against the use of contract labor and multi-tier pay systems by transnational auto companies, including Yamaha India and Royal Enfield motorcycle. In an effort to attract foreign capital, the Indian government has imprisoned for life 13 courageous workers at the Maruti Suzuki plant in Manesar, Haryana.

Workers, no matter what their nationality, language or culture, are bound in a common network of production spanning oceans and continents, making it more and more absurd to try to determine the "national identity" of the car being produced by the global working class.

This massive social force must be organized in defense of the right of workers everywhere to jobs, decent living conditions, safe working conditions and a secure retirement. This requires that workers mobilize independently of the pro-capitalist and nationalist unions. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* call for the formation of rank-and-file committees democratically controlled by workers to spearhead this struggle and link autoworkers with broader sections of the working class, including Amazon worker, steelworkers, UPS workers and teachers.

This is of necessity a political fight, posing the necessity for workers to organize as an independent social force against the capitalist class of billionaires and the profit system in a fight for a workers' government and socialism, including the transformation of the giant corporations and banks into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by workers themselves.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urge workers and young people to attend the public meeting to fight the GM closures and layoffs. The meeting will be held on December 9 at 2 p.m. at Bert's Warehouse, 2727 Russell Street in Detroit. Let us know you are attending and share the meeting info with your friends on Facebook here.



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