

A significant step forward: Detroit meeting of autoworkers resolves to form rank-and-file committees

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On Sunday, more than 80 autoworkers and other workers and youth from throughout the US Midwest resolved at a meeting in Detroit to form rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the unions, to fight against plant closures, layoffs and other attacks on the working class.

Following the meeting, a steering committee was established to carry forward the struggle against plant closures.

The action taken at the meeting, organized by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party, is a major step forward. With mounting signs of a renewed economic downturn, the capitalist ruling elites are going on the offensive. The announcement by General Motors that it will close five plants in the US and Canada and eliminate at least 15,000 jobs is part of a global restructuring aimed at making the working class pay for the funneling of ever larger sums into the financial markets.

There are growing expressions of working class opposition to this social counterrevolution. In every country, however, the working class confronts trade unions that are actively collaborating in plant closures, layoffs and other attacks by the ruling class. The past year has seen a significant increase in working class struggles in the United States, including strikes by teachers and the rejection of a national contract by UPS workers, with the unions functioning as strikebreakers.

Now, in the center of world capitalism, the working class is beginning to establish the necessary organizational and political framework for a counter-offensive.

The attendees at the meeting included delegations of autoworkers and other workers from Michigan, Indiana,

Illinois, Pennsylvania and Ohio, as well as an Amazon worker from Texas. Among the participants were several autoworkers from the GM Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly plant, one of those set to be closed, as well as many Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler workers from throughout the region.

The delegates to the meeting represented much broader layers of workers in the United States and Canada. They included black workers and white workers, men and women, young workers and older workers. The issues that dominated the meeting were class issues, not the issues of race and gender promoted by the media and the Democratic Party and its appendages.

It was, moreover, an international meeting. It included a report from Alex Lantier, the leader of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) in France, who spoke on the significance of the “yellow vest” protests against the banker-president Emmanuel Macron. It was readily recognized by all those participating that the issues facing workers in France, the United States and all over the world are essentially the same.

The meeting was the only gathering of workers to organize serious opposition to plant closures and do so independently of the United Auto Workers. For this reason, it could give genuine expression to the growing anger of workers and their determination to fight. Following an opening political report by *World Socialist Web Site* Labor Editor Jerry White, workers engaged in a full and open democratic discussion. They spoke of the real conditions in the plants, including extreme exploitation, sexual harassment and victimization.

The delegates to the meeting unanimously adopted a

resolution calling for the formation of “rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, Unifor [in Canada] and other unions, in all the affected workplaces and neighborhoods, to organize opposition to the plant closures.” The committees, the resolution stated, will “advance the interests of workers in opposition to the dictates of corporate management,” “mobilize workers on the basis of their own demands,” “demand that workers have unrestricted access to all corporate and union financial records and oversight over all negotiations and contract votes,” and “fight for the unity of American workers with our class brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico and the rest of the world.”

Hostility to the UAW was universal. The anti-working class character of the union—its theft of workers’ wages, its corruption and its role in imposing attacks on the working class through threats and fraud—was not questioned by any of the participants.

One Chrysler worker called the UAW the “controlled opposition” against workers, where “every concession is nothing more than an aspect of attrition in their war.”

Another worker explained that at her plant, workers have already begun to “meet outside of union meetings, outside of work, in order to come together and get resolutions and solutions.”

Another declared, “We’re going against management and the people that are supposed to be protecting us [the unions], but they really aren’t. They’re working with management.”

Delegates also heard a powerful contribution from Shannon Allen, the Texas Amazon worker who has emerged as a leader of opposition to conditions at Amazon facilities after her experience with being injured and forced into homelessness. “We’re the ones who make the world go ’round,” Shannon declared to applause. “It’s not the Jeff Bezoses of the world. It’s us!” She made a powerful appeal for the unity of all workers. “Without you, there is no us,” she said, “without us, there is no you.”

The meeting marked a significant development not only of class, but also of political consciousness. It marked a turn by workers to a political struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

The central role of the *World Socialist Web Site* in organizing and providing political leadership to the developing movement of the working class was

recognized by those attending, many of whom spoke about the influence of the WSWS in the plants. One worker asked whether the rank-and-file committees “would be permitted to use the WSWS as a communicating tool, as a voice and unique educator? And will the Socialist Equality Party provide the leadership so that we can go on and function on a strategic level?”

The answer is “Yes.” The role of the SEP and the WSWS in giving political direction to the developing movement of the working class is critical. The growth of the class struggle is an objective process. However, the task of imparting to this movement independent organization and socialist consciousness requires the construction of a socialist political leadership in the working class.

As WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North, speaking to the meeting from New Zealand, emphasized, “It isn’t enough to point to the betrayal of other organizations. What we have to come to grips with is what it means to build another leadership. That is our responsibility.”

The meeting in Detroit marked a major step forward. It was infused by a determination to fight, a confidence in the immense power of the working class, and an understanding of what is necessary to unify and mobilize this power—the greatest revolutionary force on the planet. The initiative taken at this meeting must be expanded. It must serve as a rallying point for the formation of independent workers’ organizations and the conscious development of the class struggle in the United States and throughout the world.



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