

Autoworkers, supporters demonstrate in Detroit to oppose GM closures and layoffs

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11 February 2019

More than 100 autoworkers and supporters from across the Midwest marched Saturday in Detroit to oppose General Motors' plans for plant closings and layoffs in the US and Canada. The demonstration was organized by the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* and the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank and File Committees.

GM announced plans late last year to close five plants, including major assembly plants in Detroit-Hamtramck, Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario and destroy the jobs of 14,000 production and salaried workers. The first layoffs came last week, as GM began dismissing 4,250 white-collar workers.

Saturday's demonstration—the first and only organized opposition to the closures and layoffs—was called on the basis of the fight to unify the working class internationally, independently of the unions, through the formation of rank-and-file factory committees. The pro-company unions, the UAW in the US and Unifor in Canada, are doing nothing to stop the closures, instead pushing the poison of nationalism by blaming workers in Mexico.

The rally and subsequent meeting at Second Baptist Church of Detroit were followed by workers all over the world on social media. The protest received powerful statements of support from representatives of framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers in India, tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka, and striking auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico. Greetings were also sent from workers in Turkey, Germany, the UK and Australia.

Workers and young people from across Michigan, Illinois, Iowa and upstate New York marched for an hour in front of the GM world headquarters at the Renaissance Center on the riverfront in downtown Detroit. Delegations of students were mobilized by branches of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Wayne State in Detroit and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

The demonstrators chanted slogans, including: "Same struggle, same fight! Workers of the world, unite!"; "Detroit, Oshawa, Lordstown, we won't let them shut you down!"; and "Wage cuts and job losses! The union's working with the bosses!"

Demonstrators held signs which read "No layoffs! No concessions! Fight GM plant closings," called for the abolition

of the hated two-tier wage and benefits and for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every plant. Others held signs that read "No more givebacks! This is where concessions stop," "Fight against the corporate-controlled UAW," "Fight for workers control over the factories," and "Fight for socialism! Social need, not private profit."

The rally was addressed from the steps of the Renaissance Center by Lawrence Porter, a former Chrysler worker and the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, and Jerry White, the editor of the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*.

"This demonstration has shown that the working class has taken a stand," Porter told the crowd. "A stand against the plans of General Motors. A stand against low wages. A stand against attempts to divide workers from their brothers and sisters all over the world. And a stand against the unions, which have joined hands with management. This demonstration is saying the time for givebacks and concessions is over. Working people are looking for a way to fight!"

White denounced GM's decision to close the plants and devastate the working-class communities that rely on them. "We are gathered here today to say that we do not accept this illegitimate decision. We will not sit idly by for another criminal attack by corporations to throw workers out on the streets who have produced billions and billions in profits for these corporations!"

"Since the first bailout of Chrysler in 1979," White declared, "the United Auto Workers has told autoworkers year after year after year that they must accept wage and benefit cuts to save their jobs. And what has that produced? Six hundred thousand workers have lost their jobs, older workers have been pushed out and a new generation of young autoworkers is coming in at poverty wages, at part time labor with no rights whatsoever, even though they continue to pay dues to the UAW. No organization that takes bribes from corporations and owns 100 million shares in General Motors is going to do anything to defend autoworkers."

White explained that the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank and File Committees was formed by autoworkers, Amazon workers and teachers at a meeting on December 9 to take the struggle out of the hands of the corporate-controlled unions and mobilize the working class against the capitalist

system.

After listening to the speeches, the protesters then marched through downtown Detroit to the Second Baptist Church, which served as a stop on the Underground Railroad for escaped slaves prior to the US Civil War. The meeting was addressed by White, WSWWS International Editorial Board Chairman and SEP National Chairman David North, SEP National Secretary Joseph Kishore and WSWWS writer Eric London.

North began by remarking on the historical resonance of the demonstration with the history of the church. “You can only imagine how those who came to this church in the 1850s saw conditions. Who could have imagined in 1855 that within a decade the slave power would no longer exist?”

Speaking of the rally, North said, “This is where the opposition was organized.” He explained that the demonstration “gave conscious expression to the aspirations of a class, a class whose social consciousness and understanding of the world in which it lives is developing.” The demonstration was an anticipation of things to come, he said.

“The slogans which we articulated today are slogans which will be taken up by millions and tens of millions in the period ahead,” North declared. “We are fighting to bring the working class into active political life, to provide the masses with a political orientation.”

White followed North, explaining, “We are fighting for emancipation, to put an end to modern day slavery, wage slavery, and put an end to capitalism which has created levels of social inequality which would make the pharaohs blush.” He also brought greetings to the meeting from Jitender Dhankar, a member of the provisional committee of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union in India.

After workers rebelled against the company union to form their own independent organization, thirteen leaders of the new union were framed up and sentenced to life in prison for the death of a manager in a violent confrontation staged by the company. “It is necessary that we build our unity and base our struggle not on one company or on one nation, but by mobilizing the workers of the world,” Dhankar said in his letter. (The greetings will be published in full on the WSWWS.)

London spoke of the immense significance of the ongoing struggles of workers in Mexico, who, London noted to applause, “have come down with an old-fashioned case of strike fever.” The strikes have been organized in opposition to the trade unions. “Workers in different countries may not speak the same language, may have different skin colors, but they all belong to the same working class... The fight for the international unity of the working class is not a holiday phrase, it is a strategic necessity.”

London brought messages of support from workers in Mexico and immigrant workers in the United States who have been persecuted by the Trump administration. One of those workers, Griselda, a leader of the rank-and-file committee at Fisher Dynamics in Matamoros, gave her support to “the call for a

general strike in Canada, the US and Mexico to put an end to layoffs, abuses and to win fair salaries. We must be united. There are no borders in our fight. We stand firm here.”

Kishore, the final speaker, said that the demonstration had laid down a strategy—that the working class must be organized independently of the trade unions, that it must be based on the unity of all workers, and that it cannot be subordinated to the profits of the corporate and financial elite.

Kishore spoke about the significance of Donald Trump’s declaration in his State of the Union address that “America will never be a socialist country.” The ruling class is terrified, Kishore said, of the growth of working-class opposition, not just in the United States but around the world. He explained that both parties, Democrat and Republican, are united in their opposition to the working class.

The actions of GM, Kishore said, exemplify the nature of capitalism. “If you want to know what capitalism is, it is GM shutting down five plants and then handing over billions of dollars to its Wall Street investors.”

“The ruling class is afraid of the working class,” Kishore said. “This idea, the idea of the class struggle, the idea of social revolution, the idea of a society that is run on the basis of the interests of the working class, that is based on equality rather than profit, this idea, once it has gripped the masses—and it is gripping the masses—is the most powerful force on the planet.”

Nick, an auto worker who had been fired for defending female employees who were being sexually harassed by union officials, reviewed the experience of autoworkers over the past several years, explaining the significance and role of the WSWWS in providing workers with information and a voice. He told the audience, “We scare them, and they have right to be scared. We will take action, but we won’t do it as individuals, we will do it through the Socialist Equality Party.”

North concluded the meeting by saying that the leadership of the ruling class is “rotting on its feet.” “It is not the Donald Trumps, let alone the pathetic groups of collaborators in the unions, its allies in the Democratic Party, who speak for the most profound processes of historical developments. It is this party,” the Socialist Equality Party. He called on those participating to join the SEP and build a socialist leadership in the working class.



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