

Jeep's Super Bowl ad: "Can't we all just get along?"

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During the televised February 7 NFL Super Bowl event, the Toledo, Ohio-based automaker and Stellantis subsidiary, Jeep, premiered a new advertisement calling for "healing" the massive social and political divide in the United States.

The Super Bowl is one of the largest advertising events of the year, with a 30-second television spot costing as much as some "low budget" films, at least \$5 million or more. The fact that Jeep devoted such resources not to showcase any of its products, but to craft what is essentially a propaganda reel, is a reflection of the ruling class's deep anxiety to growing social opposition among workers and young people.

Titled "The Middle," the ad features American singer-songwriter Bruce Springsteen as he travels through snowy Lebanon, Kansas in a restored 1980 Jeep CJ-5 (one of the company's most widely-produced models) to a small chapel which is located at the geographical center of the United States. The ad is meant to serve as a springboard for Jeep's "The Road Ahead" campaign. Under Stellantis' close supervision, Springsteen provided the words to go along with the ad, and the accompanying music, which he composed with long-time collaborator Ron Aniello.

Using the chapel as a metaphor for the idiom to "meet in the middle," Springsteen states, "It's no secret the middle has been a hard place to get to lately. Between red and blue. Between servant and citizen. Between our freedom and our fear." Springsteen goes on to explain that "freedom ... belongs to us all," that it "connects us and we need that connection."

Eventually, Springsteen informs us that "we need the middle," that is, we need to all join hands and come together because, supposedly, we all have the same interests at heart. "We just have to remember the very soil we stand on is common ground so we can get there." He concludes his monologue with trite phrases and an

assurance that "there's hope on the road up ahead."

Stellantis' sermonizing about the need for "unity," summed up in the tagline "ReUnited States of America," has apparently met with a skeptical reaction from the public at large, who are rightly not inclined to take seriously an ad that purports to combine an examination of social problems with the needs of Jeep's brand equity.

Stellantis' ad speaks of "meeting in the middle" under conditions where capitalism is sacrificing the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the interests of preserving profits and share values. All rational, humane and scientifically guided approaches to fighting the pandemic, including the shutdown of schools and nonessential industry and a program of rapid testing and contact tracing, have collided against the profit motive and private ownership.

On this issue, all factions of the ruling class, both Democrat and Republican, have "met in the middle" since the start of the pandemic. Both sides reject lockdowns as "too expensive" and are instead charging ahead with reopening the economy and ending piecemeal restrictions on public gatherings. The result of this, in light of the rapid emergence and spread of new and more deadly strains, will be even further needless loss of life.

They are enforcing this against overwhelming opposition from the working class, which has "come together" as the central social force demanding serious public health measures to get the pandemic under control. Among the most significant outbreaks of opposition came last March when autoworkers across the Midwest, including at the sprawling Jeep plant in Toledo, carried out wildcat strikes to force a shutdown of production for two months. Today, teachers and workers throughout the country are organizing opposition to the unsafe reopening of schools.

As for Stellantis and the other automakers, as well as school districts and other employers, they are "meeting in

the middle” with the pro-corporate trade unions to beat back the opposition of workers to keep them on the job. The United Auto Workers has worked hand-in-glove with management to conceal the spread of the disease in the plants and keep workers on the job, while the teachers unions in Chicago and elsewhere have been furiously working to browbeat teachers back into classrooms.

Once they were able to force open the plants with the UAW’s assistance, the automotive giants have been able to rake in record profits. GM was able to finish out the 2020 fiscal year with a pretax profit of \$9.7 billion, versus \$8.4 billion in 2019, regardless of the overall drop in sales in its most profitable market, the United States. Stellantis/Fiat Chrysler has yet to release its annual financial report, but it reaped similar windfall profits in the third quarter of last year. Fiat Chrysler reported a \$1.4 billion net profit during that period, an increase of 773 percent over the same period in 2019.

Jeep’s ad is essentially a variation of Ford’s “Finish Strong” campaign which also aired during the Super Bowl advertising blitz. That ad sought to cover-up the social disaster of the pandemic with patriotic bluster, drawing parallels between the (non-existent) national mobilization to fight coronavirus and the mobilization of US industry for the war effort during World War II.

While the mythology around the “Arsenal of Democracy” was always meant to cover up the imperialist character of the US war effort, where the ruling class dealt with the “home front” by attacking striking workers, interning Japanese Americans and imprisoning socialist opponents of the war, it was particularly grotesque coming from Ford, whose founder is well known for his open sympathies for the Nazis.

The overall messaging of the Jeep ad was also partly a response to enormous political crisis in the United States in the aftermath of the highly-coordinated fascist assault of the US Capitol building on January 6. From this standpoint, it is essentially a regurgitation of the ongoing appeals of the Democratic Party for “unity” and “healing” in the wake of the attack. For the Democrats, they are desperately trying to “meet in the middle” with the Republican Party, which helped plan, carry out and provide political cover for an attempt to overthrow the Constitution and establish a fascist dictatorship.

But behind their anodyne calls for “healing,” the Democrats are above all determined that the events of January 6 not lead to an exposure of the deep rot of the American political system, under conditions where the Democrats themselves, now that Biden has taken office,

are enforcing the bipartisan policy of “herd immunity,” especially through the premature reopening of major school districts for in-person instruction.

However, the pathetic overtures by the Democrats for “unity” have only emboldened the extreme right. This is expressed partly in the fate of Springsteen himself after the ad aired and received an angry response from right-wing commentators. Stellantis pulled the ad from circulation after media reports surfaced of Springsteen’s arrest three months prior for drunk driving. This quickly became a *cause célèbre* in the right-wing press, including the *New York Post* and Fox News, although the arrest was later exposed to be groundless because Springsteen’s blood alcohol content was well below the legal limit. This suggests unseen political motives at work, either in the initial arrest, outsized media coverage, or both.

In reality, the political and social fissures running throughout American society are not the result of mere super-heated rhetoric, much less something that can be addressed through a slick advertising campaign. Rather, they are the product of the deep crisis of the capitalist system, which is incapable of addressing social needs in a rational and democratic manner. The breakdown of democratic norms in the United States in particular is the inevitable product of a social order that prioritizes profits over millions of human lives.

In reality, the pandemic has exposed that the real and fundamental division in society is class, between the working class and the capitalists. This cannot be papered over with sentimental phrases—it requires the revolutionary transformation of society.



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