

Unionization vote at Volkswagen in Chattanooga, Tennessee hailed by Democrats and corporate media

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On Friday, workers at the Volkswagen factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee voted by a wide margin to join the United Auto Workers union, after previously rejecting the union in plant-wide votes in both 2014 and 2019.

According to figures from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), of the 4,300 workers eligible to vote at the plant, 2,628 votes, or roughly 73 percent of the ballots cast, were in favor of joining the UAW. Voting no were 985 workers. Nearly 17 percent abstained.

The NLRB said that if the election is not challenged within five business days, it will certify the results, after which the German-based automaker and the UAW will begin negotiations for a contract. The VW plant in Tennessee is the only VW plant in the US, and the only non-union VW plant in the entire world.

Speaking Friday, UAW President Shawn Fain employed Christian rhetoric to describe the vote. He said:

As Matthew 17:20 states, and I quote this: “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move.”

He added, “You already moved one mountain and now we’re gonna move another one,” referring to efforts by the UAW to unionize the Mercedes Benz factory in Vance, Alabama and other southern auto plants.

But references to the Bible do not shed any light on underlying factors behind the large “yes” vote, let alone the inevitable clash between workers’ aspirations and the pro-company agreement the UAW bureaucracy has already promised VW.

The southern states are no longer economic backwaters, dominated by agriculture. The growth of the auto and auto parts industry in the region has drawn together a racially diverse work force, numbering more than 150,000, who are employed by global

companies and connected to workers in Asia, Europe and Latin America. In addition, a significant number of workers in the South either migrated from or have family connections in the northern states.

Just like their counterparts in the north, these workers are chafing under low pay, the high cost of living, exhausting work hours and dangerous working conditions. They realize they cannot fight giant corporations as individuals and that collective action is needed.

Sooner rather than later, however, workers at VW, Mercedes Benz and other plants will find that they are confronting a fight not only against corporate management, but also against the UAW apparatus. This is already the case in Germany, where VW workers are in a bitter fight against the UAW’s counterpart, IG Metall, which is colluding in the company’s plans to eliminate 30,000 jobs.

In an X/Twitter post issued after the vote, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US vice president Jerry White declared:

VW workers clearly want to take collective action to improve their wages and working conditions. The vote to unionize is part of the growing mood of militancy in the working class. But VW workers will quickly learn what their brothers and sisters at the Detroit 3 know from bitter experience: that they are in fight not just against management, but the pro-company UAW apparatus as well. Rank-and-file workers in the south and the north must unite to abolish the UAW bureaucracy and transfer power and decision-making to workers on the shop floor. The fight to defend jobs requires the global unity of the working class against capitalist exploitation. This means building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees

The UAW vote was universally praised by President Biden, other leading Democrats, the corporate media and top union bureaucrats. This only underscores the fact that the Democrats are looking to the UAW bureaucracy to head off and suppress a

militant movement of workers in the South and impose the type of austerity and labor discipline needed for Biden's chief concern: The expansion of American imperialism's wars for global conquest.

Following the vote, Biden congratulated workers on the "historic vote for union representation with the United Auto Workers." He added, "I was proud to stand alongside auto workers in their successful fight for record contracts, and I am proud to stand with auto workers now as they successfully organize at Volkswagen."

Revealing the chasm between the trade unions and the workers they claim to represent, Biden alleged that the vote at Chattanooga was only the latest in a series of "major wins and large raises" logged by "union members." According to Biden, these "major wins" included "auto workers, actors, port workers, writers, warehouse and health care workers, and more."

The president is well aware that these "major wins" all resulted in layoffs and other attacks on workers in every industry he named. Since the start of 2024, thousands of autoworkers have been laid off at Stellantis; UPS announced 12,000 layoffs followed by plans for the "Network of the Future," which entails replacing workers with robots and the shuttering of 200 facilities; while over 58,000 healthcare workers lost their jobs in 2023.

Biden was hardly the only Democratic politician to champion the vote at Chattanooga. Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown—a longtime advocate of trade war and anti-Asian poison—hailed the vote as the beginning of a "new era" and a "win for workers everywhere."

Top Biden campaign surrogate, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, said the vote was a "huge victory not only for UAW workers at Volkswagen but for every worker in America."

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), just before voting to send nearly \$70 billion in weapons to Ukraine and Taiwan, called the vote an "utterly historic victory for the working class."

It should be recalled that AOC and other DSA members in Congress voted to ban a strike by 110,000 railroad workers in 2022 and impose Biden's pro-company contract on rail workers who had already voted to reject the sellout.

On Sunday, AOC retweeted a writer for *The Nation* who complained "how little attention the mainstream media is giving the UAW's organizing win Tennessee."

In reality, every major newspaper carried favorable coverage of the UAW's effort to entrap workers. In its Friday headline, the *New York Times* described the vote in Tennessee as a "Labor Milestone." On Saturday, *Times* writer Noam Scheiber pondered if the "Union Victory at VW" could "Set Off a Wave?" The writer described the vote as "organized labor's most significant advance in decades."

The *Washington Post*, owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, likewise characterized the vote as "historic" and the "biggest organizing

victory in years for the UAW and for the broader labor movement."

Joining Democratic politicians and mainstream press outlets in hailing the vote were several well-paid union bureaucrats. Ali Velshi, chief MSNBC political correspondent and host of *Velshi* and *The Last Word*, brought on Association of Flight Attendants President Sara Nelson to talk about the "major breakthrough" on his Sunday program.

"This feels really monumental to me," Velshi said, to which Nelson replied, "It is monumental!"

Warmongering president of the American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten likewise called the vote a "righteous result," adding that she "couldn't be prouder" of "UAW President Shawn Fain for leading and inspiring their fight."

The universal praise from enemies of the working class for Friday's vote underscores the fact that the UAW and other nationalist trade unions are no threat to corporations or capitalist governments.

In order for workers to win what they need, they must unite with their class brothers and sisters not only in America but around the world in a fight against the corporations *and* nationalist trade union bureaucracies.

In the 2022-23 UAW election, Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman warned that the pro-company and corrupt UAW bureaucracy would not be altered through the installation of another longtime bureaucrat like Fain. He insisted that workers had to fight for the abolition of the UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the building of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace.

The fight against job cuts during the electric vehicle transition and for workers' control over conditions in the factories, Lehman insisted, requires the unity of workers across all borders. This fight is being coordinated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

VW workers must be on guard against plans by the UAW bureaucracy to ram through a pro-company contract. Instead, they must unite with rank-and-file workers in the North to carry on a common fight to defend jobs and working conditions against management, the two corporate-controlled political parties and the UAW bureaucracy.

To learn more about building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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