

SEP presidential candidate speaks to Ford Canada workers

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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White travelled to Windsor, Ontario Sunday with a campaign team to speak to Ford Canada workers voting on the concessions-laden contract negotiated by the Canadian Auto Workers. The four-year agreement accepted all of the major take-away demands of the auto companies including an expanded two-tier wage structure, cuts to pension, the elimination of cost of living allowances and a freeze on wages.

White appealed to Ford Canada workers to reject the nationalist policies of the CAW and unite in a common struggle with their brothers and sisters at the US auto plants in an industrial and political struggle against the threat of mass layoffs and concessions. White warned Ford Canada workers that the expanded two-tier wage accepted by the CAW, patterned on the concessions accepted by the US based United Auto Workers, had proved to be a disaster for US auto workers. It was condemning a generation of young workers to poverty wages and creating divisions between lower paid two-tier workers and senior workers in the plants.

“Workers can hardly afford to buy the cars they build,” said White. “The nationalist policies of the CAW and UAW are based on pitting workers against one another in a race to the bottom. I am here to fight for the unity of workers on both sides of the border.”

White and SEP supporters distributed copies of a leaflet headlined, “Oppose the Ford “pattern” of two-tier wages and concessions: For a counteroffensive of Canadian and US auto workers!” It called for the revival of militant struggle by US and Canadian auto workers based on a socialist and internationalist strategy.

The intervention by the socialist candidate provoked a frenzied reaction on the part of CAW officials, who attempted to stop White and his supporters from

speaking to workers. So agitated were CAW officials by the presence of genuine socialists they even followed SEP supporters into the street in an attempt to prevent workers driving into the meeting venue from taking copies of the leaflet.

When challenged by SEP supporters about their policies CAW officials repeated the lie that concessions were the only way to defend jobs, claiming that was being given up today could be recovered in the next contract. They also advanced the tired alibi that struggle was impossible with the government of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper in power.

In attempting to browbeat Ford workers in to not taking the SEP leaflet the CAW officials resorted to Canadian nationalism, telling workers not to listen to White and his supporters because they were Americans. They identified American auto workers with the reactionary UAW bureaucracy, claiming US workers at the Big Three were to blame for the concessions imposed in 2009 through the forced bankruptcy and reorganization of General Motors and Chrysler.

In 1985 the CAW split from the UAW claiming that it represented a more militant opposition to concessions. In reality, the split allowed both the CAW and UAW to pursue identical nationalist policies while the auto companies pitted American and Canadian workers against one another. Since 1985, the relative cost advantage of the auto companies in Canada, based on the then weak Canadian dollar and national health care provisions—which allowed the CAW to strike a more militant posture—have all but vanished. In the wake of the massive concessions surrendered by the UAW, the auto companies are now claiming Canadian auto workers are the highest paid in the world, threatening to pull production out of the country without the CAW agreeing to massive cost savings.

Despite the attempts by CAW officials to intimidate them, many workers took the SEP leaflet and a number stopped to speak to White and his supporters. Many were eager to discuss the alternative to concessions. One worker told White, “The clock is going backwards. Where does it end?”

White replied that the fight against concessions was tied up with a fight against both the CAW and UAW and their corporatist and nationalist policies. White said that just as the SEP stood its ground against the intimidation tactics of the UAW in the United States it would not allow the CAW to block its attempts to speak to workers.

Mark, another Ford worker with 20 years in the auto industry, said, “I voted against this contract. US auto workers took really low wages—now it looks like we are undercutting them.

“This is happening to everybody all over the world. The companies want us to go backwards. And people are starting to fight back like the Quebec students who stood up against tuition increases.”

He wished White good luck in the struggle against the Democrats and Republicans in the US.

White said Canadian workers also had to build their own mass socialist party because they had no political voice either. All of the Canadian parties—the Tories, Liberals and New Democratic Party, the Parti Quebecois—defended the corporate and financial elite against the interests of the working class.

A veteran Ford worker reacted strongly to the call for a united struggle by US and Canadian auto workers. “We should go out on one big strike, the US and Canada,” he said. He agreed that, “The biggest mistake we made was splitting from the UAW, adding, “We have had a company union for a long time. I can’t remember the last time we had a strike.”

Another Ford worker, David, expressed his disagreement with the intimidation tactics the CAW was using to try to prevent workers from reading the SEP leaflet.

“They don’t want us to read this,” he said, referring to the CAW officials who were trying to stop workers from taking the SEP leaflet, “But, there is nothing wrong with two opinions. This 10-year two-tier sucks. The company is going to make more money. They are already making big bucks. They are playing us against each other. It is a losing battle.”

He expressed concern about the future of young people. “It is not just me I am worried about. It is my son. Maybe he will have to hire in at that two-tier wage.” Noting that he expected a drive to get the older workers out of the plant he remarked, “It is only a matter of time before they start offering us buyouts.”

At the same time he said he was concerned about the threat by Ford and the other US-based automakers to pull production out of Canada. “We are caught between a rock and a hard place. As soon as Obama started talking about bringing jobs to America I knew they would be low wage jobs. They are going to stick it to us because we are not willing to work for \$10 an hour.”

SEP supporters explained that the defense of jobs required that workers undertake a political struggle against the capitalist profit system. “We are socialists. We fight for the public ownership the auto companies, big banks and major corporations under the democratic control of the working class,” White told workers. To achieve this, he explained, meant that Canadian workers have to reject the alliance of the CAW with the capitalist politicians and build a political party of their own.



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