

Southern Workers Assembly

“Building a Movement to Organize Labor in the South”

www.SouthernWorker.org

252-314-2363

info@southernworker.org



MISSISSIPPI auto workers on road to historic union vote

In a historic action on July 10, workers at the Canton, Miss., Nissan automobile manufacturing plant filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board for a union recognition election with the United Auto Workers union.

The plant is one of the largest automobile plants in the U.S. South, with 6,400 workers. Eligible voters in the election are Nissan production technicians and maintenance workers totaling around 3,800. The overwhelming majority of workers at the Canton facility are African American.

Most auto workers in the South are not represented by unions. A few facilities for companies like Freightliner, Ford, General Motors, Chrysler and other smaller parts plants in the region are organized. But automakers — including Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mercedes-Benz, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen — are building factories in this region because of generous state and local incentives, right-to-work (for less!) laws and state governments eager to publicly oppose unions.

Business interests want the plants free of union organizing that builds worker solidarity and counteracts the brutal racism and continued inequalities left from the history of enslavement and Jim Crow segregation of African Americans in the South.

If the union wins the election, the Mississippi plant will be the first “foreign transplant” facility to be



‘Workers Rights = Civil Rights’ March on Mississippi by community and labor coalition, Canton, Miss., March 4, 2017.

fully unionized. At the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., the UAW only represents skilled trades workers, a small minority of the total workforce. VW is still refusing to recognize them as a bargaining unit.

With the exception of two Honda plants in rural Ohio, every U.S. auto transplant factory is in the South. A union victory at Nissan will boost organizing efforts at all of these plants.

(continued on page 4)

ALSO IN THIS EDITION:

- ★ *Southern Workers School* p. 2
- ★ *Georgia Health Care struggle* p.3
- ★ *TN workers fight privatization* p.5
- ★ *NC City workers die in heat* p. 6
- ★ *Farmworkers attacked* p.7

Southern Workers School converges in Atlanta to “build cadre” to organize the South



Eric Winston and Keanan Orr (both standing) talk with other members of Raise Up Fight for \$15 at Southern Workers School in Atlanta during a break-out discussion, April 22, 2017

By Mike Elk

Seated around a table in the dimly lit auditorium of Atlanta-based nonprofit Project South last weekend, two dozen union activists of all ages and races were trying to solve a problem – one that has vexed the southern states for a generation.

Longshoremen from South Carolina, nurses from Florida, campus workers from Tennessee, public workers employees from North Carolina, and fast-food workers had gathered to discuss one issue: how could these members of the Southern Workers Assembly help a fellow union attempt to unionize a company scattered at dozens of locations across the south? It’s a growing problem for unions, and one their opponents are determined to make sure doesn’t get any easier.

As the US economy – and particularly manufacturing – continues to expand in the south with the relocation of the auto industry, unions see big opportunities to recruit workers into the labor movement. However, they find themselves stymied by anti-union intimidation campaigns backed by big money that often include firing, intimidation and threats of plant closures if workers unionize.

With that in mind, the first question posed to the group was one that union organizers across the south find themselves asking: how would they identify workers interested in joining a union at a particular company, and make them comfortable enough to get involved in union organizing?

Many workers in the room suggest that they print union flyers and handbill the plant to gather contact information of sympathetic workers. However, some in the

group worried that by targeting the company directly, they could scare potential supporters away. Then, a 20-year-old fast-food worker named Sha Drummond raised his hand.

Drummond is new to the labor movement. A little more than a year ago, he was inspired to get involved in the Fight for \$15 campaign to raise hourly wages for fast-food workers after he saw some union organizers kicked out of a fast-food restaurant where he worked in Richmond, Virginia. He has already helped organize several strikes and learned a tremendous amount about organizing through taking action.

“We typically throw an event or house party and invite everyone,” said Drummond. “We just don’t invite people who work there, but we invite everyone in the community so that people know they have a lot of support. They know that people have their back.”

Donald Quick, a longtime veteran of the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union UE Local 150, quickly suggested that perhaps they could use social media to identify workers to invite to the event. While Drummond and Quick are separated by many years, they have one thing in common: they are both part of unions that lack traditional collective bargaining rights, and they are willing to think outside the box about how to organize in the south.

Inspired by the energy of the Fight for \$15 movement and the growing labor movement, workers involved in the Southern Workers Assembly are attempting to build the groundwork for a network to inspire a mass movement by non-union workers across the south.

However, instead of focusing on winning one intensive campaign at a high-profile employer such as Boeing or Nissan, the assembly is instead focused on building a network of smaller minority unions that lack collective bargaining to create a groundswell of union support.

“Having a union doesn’t mean you have to have a majority of workers or a union contract,” said veteran union organizer Saladin Muhammad, co-founder of the Southern Workers Assembly. “A union exists whenever workers come together to form an organization to build power.”

At the outset of the American labor movement, before the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, minority unions were quite common. Small groups of workers would often band together to put pressure on the boss. They would work the company’s internal handbooks

“A union exists whenever workers come together to form an organization to build power”
Saladin Muhammad, co-founder of the Southern Workers Assembly

continued on page 8

HEALTH CARE IN CRISIS

Emergency: Dead on Arrival in Georgia



Healthcare workers rally at Grady Hospital demanding expansion of Medicare in Georgia and Health-care for all!

By Rita Valenti, National Nurses Union

ATLANTA - Georgia Blue Cross and Blue Shield announced it would no longer cover 'non-emergency' visits to emergency rooms in the State. Anthem's BC/BS will determine whether or not ER visits are a reimbursable emergency. Policyholders will undoubtedly hesitate to seek care for fear of bankrupting costs. The result will be more preventable deaths and unnecessary suffering for Georgians.

If the Blues can get away with this policy in Georgia, it will surely be instituted elsewhere. In a State where 79 counties have no OB/GYN; 66 no general surgeon; 63 no pediatrician; 53 counties with no hospital and cascading rural hospitals closures, Georgia healthcare is already dead on arrival. A visit to the emergency room outside of major metropolitan areas like Atlanta, Columbus, Augusta, Athens, Rome and Savannah may be moot – there are none. The 2015 Georgia Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee reported that, "Georgia has virtually no rural hospitals in counties capable of supporting an emergency room without subsidies."

Georgia's Insurance Commissioner, Ralph Hudgens predictably approved this policy. Georgia's State Insurance Department is notorious for being an arm of the corporate insurance companies since the State allows for industries that the Commissioner regulates to make campaign contributions. Hudgens is not only the recipient of the industry's vast campaign contributions, perks and gifts but also their mouthpiece. Using an anecdote comparing someone with breast cancer to a person trying

to buy car insurance after having a wreck, Hudgens said: "Well, I just had a wreck, it was my fault and I want the insurance company to pay to repair my car. And that's the exact same thing on pre-existing {health} insurance." He makes crystal clear that healthcare under capitalism is a commodity just like an automobile; a 'product' to bought not a necessity to be distributed. There is no façade of democracy here in Georgia.

All this is occurring within the context of 'repeal and replace' the Affordable Care Act. The ACA, a two-edge sword that on the one hand, curbed some of the most toxic practices of the insurance industry like exclusions for pre-existing conditions, moderated premium costs for some, ended caps on coverage and allowed for young people to stay on parents' insurance until age 26, but on the other hand, primarily was constructed to stabilize the private insurance market through huge government subsidies to corporate health insurers. ACA's most significant benefit, Medicaid expansion is the central target of the 'repeal' machinations on Capitol Hill. But the snowball rolling down this fetid Hill is not just about ending the expansion but withdrawing nearly all federal funds and oversight of any Medicaid program. Georgia and nine other Southern State governments refused to expand Medicaid. Working and poor people in the South have no choice but while acting to defend and call for Medicaid expansion must necessarily go on the offensive for Improved Medicare for All, a step in the direction toward a national public health service based on peoples' needs not the insurance marketplace.

Mississippi Auto workers (continued from 1)

Winning at Nissan will also put the UAW in a stronger bargaining position with GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler at the national level. These companies typically use competitive pressure from the transplants as a club to force concessions from UAW members who work at the Detroit Three.

While the Mississippi workers are hoping the union will help them fight the expansion of the lower-paid temporary workforce in the Nissan plant, the recent contracts for UAW-represented autoworkers in other regions have allowed the bosses to hire more temporary workers, who are paid less and have fewer benefits.

It is imperative for every autoworker, inside and outside the U.S., to be in solidarity with the Mississippi Nissan workers. But this solidarity must be free of the chauvinistic, anti-Japanese, "buy American" rhetoric that the UAW has employed in the past.

Workers' Rights = Civil Rights

Organizing at the Mississippi plant has been going on for over 12 years. On March 4, there was a mass, community-worker "March on Mississippi: Workers' Rights = Civil Rights." Several hundred people gathered in Canton to draw public attention to this struggle, including actor Danny Glover, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and Clarence Thomas, former officer of Bay Area dockworkers' International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10, spark of the 1934 West Coast General Strike.

The marchers demanded that Nissan respect employees' right to vote for a union without fear of retaliation.

In an interview with Workers World, Ernest Whitfield, a 13-year employee and press operator in the Canton plant, was clear: "We state that workers rights are civil rights. Right now our state and federal rights to have a fair vote is being threatened and suppressed."

Whitfield added, "The tactics that they are using is nothing short of what they were doing in the 1950's and 1960's as voter suppression and intimidation against Black people. That is why we link workers rights with civil rights. This is an 80 to 85 percent African-American plant."

By Tuesday, July 11, company intimidation of the workers had already started. "This week there has been a difference in the plant," said Whitfield. "Some of management's reaction has been a Mr. Nice Guy role: come out on the line, asking if there is enough air, because usually it is pretty hot. They are catering to workers in an abnormal way." Then on Wednesday, the plant manager, Steve Marsh, published an anti-union video.

The workers didn't let those tactics go unnoticed. On Wednesday, July 12, a group of workers drove down to New Orleans to drop off a box of union cards at the local National Labor Relations Board, requesting they monitor and help with a free and fair election. On Thursday, July page 4

13, two workers, Travis Parks and Eric Hearn, walked into the boss's office at the Canton plant and delivered a letter to demand that they recognize and bargain with the UAW.

By Friday night, at shift change, workers were passing out union fliers to their co-workers at the turnstiles. Later on that night, supervisors brought out fliers listing so-called facts about the UAW to scare workers.

According to Whitfield: "It was typical playbook stuff from other anti-union campaigns. Our manager spoke directly about the election, saying that the temps were left out, stating that they will not be able to vote, but that is not the case."

Temp, two-tier, all workers in organizing drive

The union has been organizing workers in the temp agencies, and close to a majority in some have filled out union cards.

Out of the roughly 6,400 workers in the plant, over 2,600 are temps who work for contractor companies. The company hires workers through the temp agencies to keep the workers divided, in an attempt to weaken them and make it more difficult to organize.

Temporary agencies inside the Canton Nissan plant include Kelly Services, Minact Yates (with about 640 workers in plant) and Yates Services. There are also subcontractors under Kelly Services, including Onin and Excelsior Services.

According to Whitfield, "Contractors do the same work that we do. We work side-by-side with them in all job categories." But there is a tiered system of pay and benefits.

Even for workers that are employed directly with Nissan there is a two tiered system, including a lower tier called "Pathway." This is for former temps now hired by Nissan who are not offered the same health insurance, pay and other benefits as other Nissan employees. For instance, Nissan workers are offered a Healthcare Reimbursement Account (HRA) with a \$1,500 annual deductible, while Pathway workers are only offered a Healthcare Saving Account (HSA) with a \$2,600 annual deductible.

'Bring the weight of the community onto this plant'

"Our goal is to union the election and bring the union into the plant, regardless of tactics management is doing," emphasized Whitfield. "We need to bring the weight of the community onto this plant. We are inviting social justice and civil rights and other community activists to let this management team know they need to back off these tactics. United we can win!"

The election is set to take place August 3 and 4 in Canton.

Martha Grevatt, trustee of UAW Local 869 and 30-year UAW Fiat Chrysler worker, contributed to this article.

United Campus Workers Fights Massive Plan to Outsource TN Public Workers!

By Diana Moyer, President UCW-CWA Local 3685

United Campus Workers, UCW-CWA Local 3865 in Tennessee, has for nearly two years been involved in a fight to keep Governor Haslam from outsourcing state facilities services workers in every state building, park, and campus to the multi-national company JLL. UCW countered this brazen attack on public workers by mobilizing our members and allies in the #TNisNOTforSale campaign. Our campaign publicizes how the proposed outsourcing scheme has bypassed the democratic process and hidden the negotiations from the public. Despite the majority of the TN General Assembly being opposed to outsourcing, the Governor has pushed through state approval of the contract and provided misinformation about job protections and taxpayer savings.

The UCW campaign has succeeded in dramatically slowing the outsourcing process and pushing back the implementation timeline. By stalling the process, we were able to build public and legislator opposition to the outsourcing. We also got them to give individual college campuses the right to decide to either “opt-in” or “opt-out” of participating in the outsourcing contract. Our campaign has kicked into high gear to convince campus leaders that outsourcing would lead to lack of accountability, a drop in service quality, and a betrayal of loyal state employees.

The #TNisNOTforSale campaign has used multiple tactics to achieve our goal of stopping outsourcing:

1. We made some noise! We have had multiple rallies, and demonstrations to raise visibility. On March 9, hundreds of members and allies from across the state came together in Nashville to meet with legislators, have a rally, and fill the lobby of the building where closed outsourcing meetings were taking place.

2. We built a broad, bipartisan coalition in the general assembly through call-ins, emails, and a powerful and effective lobbying operation led by our Legislative Committee. We were able to get a majority of the members of both the House and the Senate to sign a letter calling for a halt to outsourcing.



3. We spoke out to decision makers. Workers and student allies spoke in front of the Board of Trustees and we coordinated diverse constituencies to meet with campus Chancellors and Presidents.

4. We talked to and got the support of thousands of Tennesseans. To date we've collected nearly 8,000 petition signatures, have 7,000+ followers on Facebook, and generated hundreds of calls and emails to legislators, the Comptroller, and the Governor.

This fight has demonstrated to people the power of union solidarity! We've grown our union's membership, which in turn has increased our ability to achieve victories for working people. We are going to keep growing and fighting to stand in defense of our jobs, public services, and transparent government!

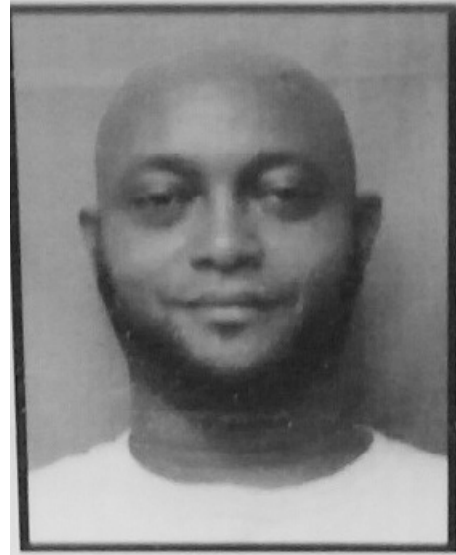
Justice for Willie and Anthony! UE150 Builds Statewide Campaign in North Carolina in wake of 2 City workers' deaths

In mid-July two laborers in Solid Waste department in the City of Charlotte, yard-waste division passed away - Willie Watters and Anthony Milledge. Union member, Charles Sifford in Water Department passed out twice on the job July 3 and was rushed to the hospital.

This was during the hottest part of the year. While the City is denying that the excessive heat they worked in had a direct impact on their deaths, the UE150 union leaders believe the City did NOT take proper precautions to prevent heat-related sickness and death. Workers and the union are in mourning, and we send our deepest condolences to the families.

In the past, the City used to call workers off their work routes if the heat index was too high. Now management claims the City is growing too big and the workers must be out in this heat! This is an outrage.

The Union is launching a statewide campaign for Health and Safety --- they plan to distribute leaflets to workers in cities across the state and host informational pickets and press conferences in several areas.



“On July 3, after working in the heat, I passed out twice. I was rushed to the hospital. There was no air conditioning in my truck that day”

- **Charles Sifford,**
Charlotte Water
Department

The City Must Immediately Implement a Heat Index Policy that accounts for temperature and humidity.

For instance, in Durham (where the union is strong) and other Cities have a Heat Mitigation Plan -- depending on the heat index (temperature AND humidity) workers should take breaks every hour. In Category 2, with heat stress index over 90 degrees, workers must take 15 minute breaks every hour. Category 3, heat index over 102 (temperature can be as low as 82 deg. with 100% humidity) workers should take 30 minute breaks every hour, and so on.



*Pictured:
Charlotte City
Workers Union, a
chapter of UE150,
leaders meet with
City Manager's
office on July 24.*

Dem. NC Governor Signs Anti-Farmworker Union Bill, Opening Door to More Attacks

RALEIGH, NC

On July 13, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, a Democrat, signed the state's Farm Act, which prohibits farmworkers' unions from collecting union dues directly from workers' paychecks.

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee and other labor and community allies rallied July 18 at the State Capitol in

Raleigh, N.C. Their immediate goal was to deliver a letter of protest to Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper who had days before signed Farm Bill SB 615, attacking the right of farmworkers to organize.

At the rally the groups announced they were filing a lawsuit to challenge SB 615 for violations of the right to freedom of assembly and the constitutional rights of farmworkers, especially for being singled out for elimination of union payroll deduction.

"This type of abandonment of immigrant workers is nothing new from the Democratic or Republican parties. We've been excluded from every labor law reform since the racist exclusion of farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act in 1935," said FLOC President Baldemar Velasquez. "We plan to challenge this bill in the courts, as a violation of farmworkers' rights to freedom of assembly and speech and to continue our fight for better wages for immigrant families in the state." (PayDay Report, July 13)

Earlier in the legislative session, a bill passed in the State Senate, SB 375, would have eliminated payroll deduction for all unions in public and private sectors in North Carolina.

But when anti-union SB 375 went to the N.C. House, push-back from unions made it impossible for sponsors to secure the necessary votes for passage.



Community and labor allies gather at FLOC rally and press conference at the N.C. Governor's Office on July 18.

Concerted opposition came from the N.C. Association of Educators, N.C. AFL-CIO, UE Local 150, the N.C. Public Service Workers Union.

So Rep. David Lewis, who chairs the House Rules committee and is a farm-owner in Dunn, N.C., pivoted to attack farmworkers by slipping anti-union language into SB 615. Besides nixing union payroll deductions, the Farm Bill SB 615 also eliminates the right of workers to collectively bargain directly with farmers.

SB 615 is a vicious attack on the progress made by FLOC in recent months, particularly with its important victories for kale and sweet potato pickers, all Latinx migrant workers. FLOC is also in the midst of a powerful international campaign to organize RJ Reynolds, whose primary U.S. source for tobacco is North Carolina fields.

The attack on farmworkers through SB 615 comes after a major wage theft settlement this January between FLOC and State Sen. Brent Jackson (R-Sampson), the powerful co-chairman of the N.C. Senate Appropriations Committee, who is president of the Jackson Farming Company.

Southern Workers School (continued)

and grievance procedures, rally community and political support to put pressure on employers, engage in shop floor disobedience and, if all else failed, go out on strike to stick it to the boss.

Eventually, these networks of minority unions built up over decades led to the massive organizing gains they achieved in the 1930s.

“Rebuilding the labor movement in the south is going to require us to get back to the basics of what a union is,” said Muhammad. “A union is about workers building power through organization.”

However, after the mass organizing waves of the 1930s, unions largely stuck to the traditional model of only representing workers in unions. This model of union organizing often relied on union representatives and labor lawyers to make sure union contracts were enforced.

Now, with the success of the strikes of Fight for \$15 in building a mass movement, unions in the south are once again beginning to experiment with minority unions – where workers voluntarily join, and pay dues, to their local union rather than the union representing the entire workforce at an employer.

In 2014, after losing a high-profile union election at Volkswagen in Chattanooga, autoworkers there formed a minority union, Local 42. Following their lead, autoworkers at a Mercedes plant in Vance, Alabama, decided to form



Workers at April 2017 Southern Workers School in Atlanta. Pictured: Raymond Sanders, Ramone Johnson (both UE150) along with Mike Payne from ILA and APRI in Ft. Lauderdale and also Bryan Thompson, an Ingalls shipyard worker from Biloxi, MS.

UAW Local 112, despite lacking a majority of workers in the plant who wanted to be members of the union.

Even without collective bargaining rights, both unions have won changes in company policies through protests and legal action. More importantly, the unions have shown real power by getting activists who they feel were wrongfully fired their jobs back.

Now the Southern Workers Assembly is hoping to link these new minority union efforts with other groups of non-union workers, as workers in the south face the uphill battle of rebuilding.

What is the Southern Workers Assembly?

The Southern Workers Assembly (SWA) is a network of local unions, worker organizations, and organizing committees, committed to building rank-and-file democratic social movement unionism (unionism with a social justice agenda, defined by and accountable to the rank-and-file) as a foundation for organizing, uniting and transforming labor power throughout the South.

SWA Core Principles: Rank-and-file democracy; national and international labor solidarity; organizing the unorganized; fighting all forms of discrimination; building a Southern labor congress; and building labor’s power for independent political action.

SWA Core Demands: Repeal Taft-Hartley and Right-to-Work laws, and collective bargaining rights for all workers.

Join the Southern Workers Assembly today!

Your membership allows you to participate in Southern Workers Assembly activities on behalf of workers.

Initiation Fee (one time): \$50 Individual Membership: \$50 annually

Organizational Membership: \$1 per member annually (\$100 minimum and \$500 maximum)

Contact us at 252-314-2363 or info@southernworker.org for the affiliation materials.

www.southernworker.org