

Clueless

By Bernard Bortnick

Recently, a member of Congress expressed outrage and concern about the decline in the living standards and prospects of the American “middle-class,” the conventional vague euphemism for workers who have the means to consume more commodities, than those without such means. His target was the decades-long tendency to “outsource” most manufacturing and even service jobs. His hand wringing will remain just that because the compulsions of profit-motivated capitalist society can no more be reversed than the motion of the planets. (Now, we learn that the manufacturing sector employs no more than 14% of the working population. He is clueless. “Only 14 per cent of the modern U.S. work force is engaged in production: manufacturing, mining, logging, construction and the like. The rest are in services.” (“Oil disaster shows a divide from physical world” by Calvin Woodward, AP)

The oil “spill” in the Gulf illustrates this trait of obliviousness as well. Like previous ruling classes, being “clueless” is a historical phenomenon that grips every ruling class and its supporters, imbued with the notion of the eternal verity of their exploitative social arrangements. They fail to see the contradictions within their systems. Thus the rulers of Ancient Rome were unable to change the fundamental underpinnings of its exploitative society namely the inefficiency of huge slave run estates that replaced the Roman farmer while dependency on conquest by mercenary armies and importation of wheat grew and grew. Thus, feudal monarchical societies collapsed because their social structure was undermined by the productive methods of capitalism and growing misery of the serfs and peasants. Both ruling classes were caught in the grip of advancing social collapse they could not perceive or make sense of. They were blinded by their material interests, their power and possessions.

The disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico illustrates the point. British Petroleum, BP, demanded the drilling go forth despite indications of potential disaster. When the rig blew in 5,000 feet of water, 11 workers died and many were hospitalized. The fishing industry in the Gulf has been all but destroyed. Beaches and marsh lands inundated; birds and wildlife killed, fish and spawning grounds destroyed for predicted unknown decades if not centuries. Tourism to the Gulf is now in serious decline.

Meanwhile, the demand and professed object of BP and the U.S. government is a commitment to clean up the spill at BP's expense. Among the things the

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Why Gag Order Cannot Hide Truth About NUMMI

By Diane Secor

Since writing the following article, Tesla Motors, Inc. has announced a joint venture with Toyota to produce electric cars at a plant where the old NUMMI factory was located in Fremont, California. The number of former NUMMI workers, who will be hired at this new plant, is problematic, to say the least. On May 26, the UAW's Region 5 director Jim Wells issued a press release stating that Tesla CEO Elon Musk has already hired some NUMMI workers, who are members of UAW Local 2244. Wells seemed rather optimistic based on a Musk statement that Tesla was “neutral” on the question of union representation of Tesla workers and that Tesla will permit these workers to make their own decision about having a union.

However, according to THE DETROIT NEWS (June 17), Tesla has not yet “made a commitment” to hire unionized workers at this new Tesla-Toyota plant. Also about 4,500 workers were laid off when that NUMMI plant was shut down, but this new Tesla-Toyota venture has only announced plans to hire a total of about 1,000 workers. Tesla's so-called “neutrality” and Toyota's attempts to eliminate unions in their North American operations do not portend well for workers at this new plant in Fremont. Even if the UAW is allowed to represent these workers in collective bargaining, workers will be under tremendous pressure to make major concessions.

Everyone knows that corporations, including Toyota, have relocated their plants to countries where labor is cheaper. UAW president Bob King proposed that the UAW help organize unions for foreign auto workers, in order to avoid “give backs” and other concessions by American workers.

However, this UAW is affiliated with the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO and their various affiliates have an abominable record in foreign countries. As stated in the January-February 2005 issue of THE PEOPLE (page 3), the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center has collaborated with U.S. imperialist interests and openly received funds from U.S. government sources, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED has a long history of doing the jobs that the CIA does, such as intervention in foreign politics, in order to secure markets, raw materials, and cheap labor for American capitalists. This is not surprising, since these AFL-CIO unions are not based on class consciousness. Then why does Toyota fear having the UAW in their plants? Toyota wants to avoid making any concessions to workers, no matter how small.

Most of all, once the workers are unionized and they see through these pro-capitalist unions, these workers will want to form their own unions, based on their knowledge of the class struggle.

The New United Motor Manufacturing Inc. (NUMMI) plant opened in 1984 in Fremont, California, as a joint venture of General Motors and Toyota. General Motors pulled out of this venture in June 2009. About two months later, Toyota announced that this plant would be shut down, notwithstanding the state of California's “financial incentives” to Toyota to avoid this closure.

In a March 17, 2010 press release, United Auto Workers Local 2244 President Sergio Santos said that this would be his last public statement on the closing of NUMMI, if his union members agreed to accept a severance deal. Subsequently this pact with Toyota was ratified by the members of UAW Local 2244. This agreement for severance pay included a “gag order,” which forbids union members from releasing any information to the public about the closing of this plant and how this may affect their lives. However press reports and even public statements by Toyota officials strongly indicate that the usual factors under capitalism are behind this NUMMI closure, that is eliminating the union and seeking cheaper labor.

In that press release, Santos protested that this gag order violates the workers rights under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and the provisions of “Freedom of Association” of the United Nations' International Labor Organization's Labor Rights Conventions. Santos said that this severance pay would only help these NUMMI workers to survive for a “few months.” He also stated that no provisions for severance pay were made for “tens of thousands” of employees of the subcontractors, who supplied this NUMMI plant with auto parts and various support services. Indeed, on August 28, 2009, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that closure of the NUMMI plant would not only mean that 4,700 NUMMI workers would lose their jobs. This NUMMI supply network of 1,100 California firms would be forced to lay off an estimated 18,800 workers, according to the East Bay Economic Development Alliance. Other sources have calculated that 30,000-50,000 jobs outside of the plant could be at risk in the event of a NUMMI shut down.

This NUMMI plant was known for the production of Tacoma trucks and Corol-

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Reducing Energy Usage

By James McHugh

Over the past several decades we have heard much on the need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Political officeholders were averse to the nation being vulnerable to having our oil supplies cut off by foreign countries with unstable states or unfriendly regimes. Although this sentiment has been voiced at least as far back as the Carter administration, not much has been done to reverse the trend. Since most of the imported oil is converted to gasoline to power automobiles and other motor vehicles it would seem that any plans to abate oil imports would include curtailing auto usage. This has never been endorsed by any business leader or government official.

However, a recent book by David Owen titled *Green Metropolis* addresses these issues and recommends that we live in more compact communities and in multistory buildings. These communities would allow multiuse zoning such that we would be able to walk or take a short mass transit ride to reach our usual destinations. In other words, the current solutions being offered that focus on substitute fuels for automobiles and higher fuel economy are inadequate for the task. Instead of more efficient cars driving the same distances, we need to reduce the distances traveled and travel by foot, bicycle, or mass transit. Mr. Owens also recommends that we live in more modestly sized homes than the 2,000–3,000 square foot ones built now. Smaller homes have lower energy requirements and can store less “stuff,” thus limiting our ability to consume more goods which might require more energy in their use to say nothing of the energy used in their production and distribution.

Mr. Owens also stresses that the idealized presentation often given to country or rural living isn’t valid. City dwellers use a great deal less energy than their rural counterparts. He also challenges the validity of so-called eco or environmentally sound products. These include windmills, rooftop solar panels and gardens, high-tech windows and hybrid cars. These products can be quite expensive and will not compensate for the extra energy needed to continue suburban living. A good example of business efforts to exploit market possibilities for environmental products was a local Green Lifestyle Fair I attended this March in Westbrook, Ct. The fair offered products like insulation and solar panels for both electricity and hot water production. However, it didn’t seem likely that many workers could afford to pay for them. Also, none of these products challenged the continuance of suburban living, and if anything, might make these measures seem adequate to address the problem.

While Mr. Owen’s book is quite informative, he does not discuss the economic consequences of shrinking the auto, auto repair, auto insurance, auto loan, and oil industries to say nothing of reducing average home size and attendant furnishings. Certainly this writer for the *New Yorker* magazine must know that consumer spending drives 70 per cent of the gross domestic product. The country’s capitalist economy would suffer greatly if his guidance were put in effect.

Rather than recommending broader and more meaningful changes, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s energy usage (carbon footprint) questionnaire at www.epa.gov seems quite tame. For example, it recommends using a more efficient car but not mass transit. Nor is there mention of family planning/population control, living in more compact communities, or diet modification to reduce meat consumption. Meat production requires high energy usage. Certainly, the U.S. EPA is not recommending any substantial deviation from the

status quo.

Indeed, most of the industrial and governmental efforts to reduce oil/gasoline consumption have centered on improving auto efficiency, i.e., gas mileage, or using alternative fuels. No broad changes in the way we live are mentioned in the popular press. At most we might be told to carpool or buy a hybrid car. One front page article in *The Day* of New London, Ct. provided pictures and a description of one commuter who pedals a bicycle eighty miles round trip every day to go to work. Obviously, this is not a practical solution and I wondered if it was presented to discourage any consideration of alternatives to the status quo. In this regard the Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, responded to demands to end offshore oil drilling, in the wake of the recent spill in the Gulf of Mexico, by stating that we must continue with drilling, we can’t go back to living in tents and caves. Bicycles? Tents and caves? Are these our only solutions or does capitalism want us to believe these are our only options?

The truth, I believe, is that capitalism has no options but to continue its own wasteful practices. It is up to workers to organize and build a sustainable future for themselves.

...NUMMI

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las. Toyota announced with “deep regret” that production of Tacomas would be transferred to a plant in San Antonio and Corollas would be built in factories in Japan and in Ontario, Canada. A report on www.statesman.com also dated Aug. 28, 2009, stated that Toyota announced that this NUMMI production of Tacomas would be relocated to a Toyota plant in San Antonio by “next summer.” Toyota Executive Vice President Atsushi Niimi said that it would not be “economically viable” to keep producing Tacomas at NUMMI in Fremont, California.

Why would this not be “economically viable” for Toyota?

In supplying Toyota with cheap labor, NUMMI and NUMMI’s subcontractor supply system could never compete with San Antonio’s TMMTX’s “auto plant corridor,” which runs from Mexico City to Atlanta, Georgia. A Case Study, “How Globalization Works: Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Texas (TMMTX),” by Richard D. Vogel, explains that TMMTX is right in the center of this corridor.

In addition to this corridor, in 2004, another Mexican plant in Tijuana was established called the Toyota Motor Manufacturing de Baja California (TMMBC).

The city of San Antonio, Bexar County, the state of Texas, and the United States government all gave Toyota plenty of “incentives” to create this TMMTX plant, estimated to total more than \$227 million. TMMTX received tax breaks, free utilities, and government-subsidized transportation and training for workers. The “executive committee of the capitalist class” obviously wants to encourage these TMMTX trends and labor practices. These trends were also facilitated by the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a pact among the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Vogel also pointed out that TMMTX’s assembly plant serves as a “focal point of a complex production

chain” with ties to mines and factories in Asia, Mexico, and the southern part of the U.S. This TMMTX “hub” includes engineering and management centers in Japan and America, as well as cross-continental transportation systems. This network provides auto parts made with cheaper foreign labor to assembly lines at TMMTX, a plant with some of the lowest labor costs within the United States. Most of these parts are made in Toyota-owned plants in Mexico.

Another goal of moving production from NUMMI to TMMTX and TMMBC was union-busting, gutting and eventually eliminating the UAW from Toyota plants in North America. According to this Case Study, NUMMI was the only unionized Toyota factory with workers represented by the UAW, which is why Toyota relocated some of the NUMMI Tacoma production to TMMBC in Tijuana. But Toyota had consistently pressured these NUMMI workers in the UAW to increase “give backs” in wages and benefits, leading them to believe that this could save their jobs at NUMMI. However, with the far cheaper labor available elsewhere, Toyota would not keep NUMMI in operation in Fremont. In 2005, those unionized NUMMI workers received \$28 an hour plus benefits, TMMTX workers were paid \$15.25 an hour, while TMMBC workers received a mere \$3.90 an hour. This shows why Toyota decided to dump NUMMI and expand production at TMMTX and whenever possible at TMMBC. After years of such deception in demanding concessions from the UAW members at NUMMI, Toyota had plenty of reasons to impose a gag order, as a condition for severance pay.

Toyota’s promises could never save NUMMI workers nor Toyota workers anywhere from the nature of capitalism itself. In the cut-throat competition among capitalists in this world, those with the cheapest labor will have the advantage. The cause of unemployment, insecurity, and misery in the working class is capitalism, not “globalization,” which is generally presented as a new trend since the 1990’s. The historical record shows that the capitalist drive for profits, for cheap foreign labor or the cheapest domestic labor, is the same old story from generation to generation under capitalism.

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Obama administration has demanded is that dividends not be paid to BP investors. This raised an agonizing cry among international capitalists with a reminder of how essential BP is to the world’s capitalist class especially American and British capitalists. BP is a mainstay of imperialist military incursions worldwide and especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s not hard to see where the opposition to crippling penalties to BP and its collateral allies is going to come from.

The critical issue is not whether capitalists and its political agents remain blind and dumb to the effects of their system of despoliation. The critical problem is whether the working class can rise out of the class-imposed stupor that it is now in, organize itself, and move to establish a sane economic system.