

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## UAW charters local at Chattanooga plant



By John Wojck

**T**he United Auto Workers union announced on July 10 the formation of UAW Local 42, a new local that began representing workers at the Volkswagen plant here as of yesterday.

At a press conference here union leaders and workers from the plant, proudly sporting T-shirts emblazoned with “UAW Local 42: Chattanooga, Tennessee,” lined up on stage at the local International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers building to announce that the new local would support the “works council” approach to worker involvement. Volkswagen’s business model developed in Germany, the union leaders and workers said, includes a works council as a mechanism for worker representation. “Being part of the creation of an American-style works council is a chance to do something new and different,” said Michael Cantrell, a Volkswagen paint technician. “This is about securing good jobs for the future of the plant and Chattanooga.” The union officials present said that Local 42 will represent any interested employee at the plant who joins the local as a member but that no workers will be required to join.

“Earlier this year, the UAW was gratified to earn the confidence and support of many Volkswagen team members,” said Dennis Williams,

president of the UAW, at the press conference. “At that time we said we would not give up on those committed and hard-working employees. We’re keeping our promise.”

The union has been negotiating with Volkswagen since it narrowly lost a representation vote last February by 712-626. Since the vote came after the spending of millions of dollars on ads by right-wing groups and after threats and even lies from GOP politicians including Tennessee Sen.

### T H I S   W E E K :

- **UAW charters local at Chattanooga plant**
- **Port truck drivers walk off the job in LA**
- **Pipeline spews saltwater into reservation**
- **Neruda militante comunista y poeta comprometido**
- **Contract gives Johns Hopkins workers hefty raises**

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Bob Corker and Gov. Bill Haslam, the union filed a challenge to the election with the National Labor Relations Board. The UAW dropped the challenge, however, after being assured by Volkswagen that the company was open to finding a route to union representation for its Chattanooga workers.

**The UAW reached an agreement with Volkswagen to recognize the union.**

“We’ve had ongoing discussions with Volkswagen and have arrived at a consensus” said Gary Casteel, the UAW’s secretary-treasurer. “Upon Local 42 signing up a meaningful portion of Volkswagen’s Chattanooga workforce, we’re confident the company will recognize Local 42 by dealing with it as a members’ union that represents those employees who join the local,” Casteel said. “As part of this consensus,” he added, “the UAW is committed to continuing its joint efforts with Volkswagen to ensure the company’s growth and expansion in Chattanooga.” Company assurance to the union notwithstanding, the UAW still has to deal with right-wing politicians in Tennessee who don’t want to see any unions in their state. Sen. Corker, in fact, was in Chattanooga earlier this week apparently trying to gum up the works. He said he wants to introduce a bill that would allow companies to establish internal labor boards without a union being involved. Such a board would be contrary to the works councils at Volkswagen which have both union and company involvement. Corker also ran what the union considered a campaign of threats during the rep-

resentation election drive last winter by telling workers that if they voted for the union the company would not open a second assembly line at Chattanooga. Now the union is concerned about a promise by the state of Tennessee to grant \$300 million in economic incentives for Volkswagen to add that new product line. “State officials have assured the public and the Volkswagen workforce that the decision on incentives for Chattanooga is not related to whether workers exercise their right to join a union,” said Ray Curry, the newly-elected director of UAW Region 8. Union officials were also asked yesterday why, considering that outside interference was behind the loss of the representation election, the union had decided to drop its case at the NLRB. Casteel replied, “We withdrew objections to end the controversy and put the focus where it belongs: obtaining the economic incentives necessary to ensure the growth of Volkswagen in Chattanooga and the addition of the new product line.”



John Wojcik is co-editor of Peoplesworld.org.

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## Port truck drivers walk off the job in LA

By Rossanna Cambron

**P**ort truck drivers say they were left with no choice but to walk off their jobs July 7 because the companies that employ them continually rob them of their wages and retaliate against them when, in response, they try to form a union.

The drivers note that high on the list of labor law violations they have experienced is wage theft resulting from the company practice of misclassifying them as independent contractors rather than employees. Unlike regular employees, drivers misclassified as independent contractors are forced to pay all the expenses involved in maintaining their trucks. The company deducts those expenses from their checks leaving them with pay that can fall below the minimum wage rate.

“All companies at all terminals are idled today, this is different from previous strikes,” declared Alez Paz, a driver who was fired just days after he testified before the National Labor Relations Board on the issue of misclassification.

The unfair labor practices strike by more than 400 drivers at truck yards and marine terminals at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach impacts some 40 percent of U.S. imports which are moved through the twin ports.

Port truck drivers who work long hours hauling nearly \$4 billion worth of cargo every day and often receive paychecks below the minimum wage. The drivers, who transport imports from American seaports to companies like Walmart, Home Depot, Sketchers Shoes, and Polo/Ralph Lauren, see themselves as being on the front lines of the fight for a fair day’s pay for a hard day’s work. They say this is why they are fighting to bring in a union.

Byron Contreras, company driver for Greenfleet System, explained: “My coworkers and I realized that the best chance for improving our working conditions is to do what other truck drivers have done, that is to form a union with the Teamsters.”

**Wage theft is high on the list of labor law violations experienced by drivers.**

## Pipeline spews saltwater into reservation

By Blake Deppe

**A**n underground pipeline in Mandaree, North Dakota spilled one million gallons of tainted saltwater after it leaked sometime during the fourth of July weekend. The saltwater is a byproduct of oil and natural gas production, and contains traces of chemicals used in fracking. The mess has since stretched 8,240 feet - down a steep ravine and dangerously close to a lake that serves as the natural water source for a Native American reservation.

Lake Sakakawea, a reservoir of the Missouri River, provides drinking water to several communities on the Fort Berthold Native American reservation including the Manda, Hidatsa and Arikara tribes.

The pipeline is owned by Arrow Pipeline LLC, a subsidiary of Crestwood Midstream Partners, Inc. Company officials have admitted that the spill has already severely damaged trees, shrubbery, and grasses with possible negative health effects on local wildlife still being ascertained. The area is considered one of the worst spots for such a spill, because of the rough topography and sensitive ecosystem. In fact, the inaccessible terrain has forced crews to carry cleanup equipment to the area by hand, slowing the recovery process.

The EPA arrived to assess the site on July 10, in order to make sure the saltwater had not reached the lake, which is essentially the lifeblood of the reservation. Officials with the agency said beaver dams had been poisoned by the mixture, and that it had pooled up on the ground and soaked into the soil. It was predicted that cleanup will likely take many weeks.

However, the fact that the saltwater has not reached the lake is not due to the help of Crestwood. The Three Affiliated Tribes, an organization that represents the three local tribes, took it upon themselves to erect a barrier between the toxic



spillage and their pristine water. "We have a berm and a dike around Bear Den Bay," which leads to Lake Sakakawea, "to keep it from going into the lake," said Three Affiliated Tribes chairman Tex Hall.

Kris Roberts, an environmental geologist with the North Dakota Department of Health, said the spill was significant and damaging. He remarked, "We've got dead trees, dead grasses, dead bushes, dying bushes."

The area involved is in the heart to the state's oil boom patch. The number of saltwater spills in the state has grown in tandem with its oil development, as well as the rate of pure oil spills. In 2012, there were 141 pipeline leaks reported - 99 of them spilled 8,000 barrels or more of saltwater. For the Native Americans' part, this latest incident has rattled them - and a worse one could happen and end up truly polluting their only clean water source.

"Along with many others in Western North Dakota, I drink water from Lake Sakakawea," said Theodora Bird Bear, a Dakota Resource Council member from the area. Her view of the matter, like that of many others, was not optimistic. "With 13 oil pipelines crossing the bottom of the lake," she said, "I expect it is a matter of when, not if, there's a major spill."

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## Contract gives Johns Hopkins workers hefty raises

By PAI

Some 2,000 low-paid workers - janitors, maintenance workers and technical workers - at one of the nation's leading university hospital systems, Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, will be in line for hefty raises under a new contract reached July 8. Workers voted on the pact on July 10-11. Union leaders recommended its approval.

The workers, represented by Service Employees 1199 United Healthcare Workers East, achieved wages of \$15 an hour - the nationwide demand of low-wage workers for a living wage - for 20-year veteran workers next year, and \$14.50 an hour for 15-year veterans.

Hopkins workers now make so little that 70 percent qualify for food stamps, SEIU said.

"This is an important victory for patients and workers all across Baltimore," said John Reid, executive vice president of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East for Maryland/ DC. "Johns Hopkins Hospital sets the standard for healthcare in our city and that standard has just been raised."

The union and university officials achieved the pact after marathon bargaining sessions in the first week of July. Those sessions were prompted when Gov. Martin O'Malley, D-Md., stepped in and stopped a planned 4-day strike in late June.

The workers previously struck for three days, with advance notice, earlier in April. Law requires advance notice of planned strikes by health care workers, and permits government intervention.

## La gente y la naturaleza antes que las ganancias

Por Enrique García Rojas

El más grande poeta del siglo XX en cualquier idioma, en palabras de García Márquez. Efectivamente, Pablo Neruda logró su notable jerarquía literaria gracias a su labor poética; la condición de cantor universal se relaciona con su inmensa humanidad, imposible separarlo del empeño ideológico. De la mano, militancia comunista y poesía comprometida.

La poesía de sus inicios llegó a los lectores con el libro *Crepusculario* (1923) y se afirma con *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (1924). Estos son los libros más popularizados de Neruda, a juzgar por las ediciones que se agotan y se siguen solicitando. Salió de Chile a cumplir funciones consulares en Birmania, los poemas de esa época aparecen en el libro *Residencia en la Tierra* (1937). El lugar que despertó su sensibilidad social fue España. El poeta se desempeñaba como cónsul en Barcelona, lo sorprende la guerra civil, estos sucesos dan paso a un lenguaje poético de emergencia revolucionaria expresado con el texto *España en el corazón* (1937). Su gran alegato poético *Canto General* (1950), largo poema épico que impresiona por su extensión, convierte en materia poética la historia del continente americano. Cuando Neruda ingresó a la política no salió más de ella y se expresó en su larga militancia en el Partido Comunista de Chile al que dedicó unos sentidos versos:

*A mi Partido  
Me has dado la fraternidad ha-*

*cia el que no conozco*

*Me has agregado la fuerza de todos los que viven*

*Me has vuelto a dar la patria como en un nacimiento*

*Me has dado la libertad que no tiene el solitario*

*Me enseñaste a encender la bondad, como el fuego*

*Me diste la rectitud que necesita el árbol*

*Me enseñaste a ver la unidad y la diferencia de los hombres*

*Me mostraste como el dolor de un ser ha muerto en la victoria de todos*

*Me enseñaste a dormir en las camas duras de mis hermanos*

*Me hiciste construir sobre la realidad como sobre una roca*

*Me hiciste adversario del malvado y muro del frenético*

*Me has hecho ver la claridad del mundo y la posibilidad de la alegría*

*Me has hecho indestructible porque contigo no termino en mí mismo*

En conclusión, para Neruda el militante, el escritor debía contribuir a la representación verídica e históricamente concreta de la realidad en su desarrollo revolucionario y también a la transformación ideológica y a la educación del hombre y la mujer dentro del espíritu del socialismo. Nuestro camarada Pablo Neruda produjo libros comprometidos, pero también poesía pura, la poética nerudiana es pues diversificada y posee una riqueza literaria que lo convirtió en uno de los poetas más importantes de su época.

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