

UAW IGNORES EMPLOYEE VOICES

*Nissan employees respond to UAW with deafening silence
as union fights for its life*

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Here in Mississippi, despite years of engagement with Nissan workers, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union has yet to petition for an election. In fact, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Gary Casteel recently told the [Detroit Free Press](#) that the union's "endgame" is simply to put more public pressure on the company. This is a troubling comment. An organization that purports to advocate for the worker's voice refuses to listen to the deafening silence coming from Nissan's employees in reaction to the union's overtures. It's a two-sided coin: Employees certainly have the right to organize, but they have just as much of a right not to form a union if that is their choice.

The arrival of Nissan in 2003 was a true game changer for the Jackson area, realizing the region's potential as an automotive hub and bringing thousands of jobs to the state of Mississippi. Today, Nissan provides our community with nearly 6,500 highly-skilled, well-paying jobs and contributes close to \$3 billion to Mississippi's GDP each year.

It's no wonder that employees at the Canton facility have completely ignored overtures by the UAW during its five-year campaign to organize the plant. Despite Nissan's undeniable success story, the union has made the Canton plant one of the targets of a failed effort to organize international auto plants across the South. The UAW argues that this campaign is about workers. In reality, it's driven by self-interest.

While the union has seen minor gains in recent years, the fact remains that the UAW's membership has [declined by more than two thirds](#) since its peak in 1979. In 2011, former UAW President Bob King [laid out](#) in stark terms what's at stake for the union: "If we don't organize these transnationals, I don't think there's a long-term future for the UAW, I really don't."

This is why the union is desperately trying to organize southern automotive plants under the guise of giving workers a voice. So far, however, the UAW has been unable to win an election among the full workforce at any automotive facility in this part of the country, even under the best of circumstances.

In 2014, the union called for a vote at Volkswagen (VW) in Chattanooga, TN, that garnered national attention. The company's culture of labor participation in corporate decision-making at its German factories seemed to bode well for the organizing drive.

But in a secret-ballot election, VW employees turned the union down. The recent rejection of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers by almost three quarters of employees who voted at a Boeing factory in South Carolina further underscores the challenges that labor is facing in the South.

With its back against the wall, can the UAW be trusted to put workers first and create new opportunities for Mississippians the way Nissan does? The union's latest contracts with Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler suggest the answer is "no." As [The Detroit News](#)' Daniel Howes wrote in late 2015, these agreements "favor short-term financial gains for existing members over longer term prospects for job growth in U.S. plants." Already this year, we have seen [thousands of layoffs at UAW plants](#) in Michigan and Ohio while jobs in Mississippi's auto sector continue to grow. In fact, Nissan and its suppliers have directly generated more than 25,000 jobs throughout Mississippi and are fostering the creation of many more through the success of other advanced manufacturers that are building on the foundation laid by Nissan.

The UAW is, of course, well within its rights to run an organizing campaign at Nissan Canton. But as our community considers the union's arguments, we should have no illusions about its true motives or its ability to deliver opportunity for our state.