

Ohio Reps Hold Hearing To Save Auto Industry

On Feb. 16, 2006, State Rep. Catherine Barrett (D-Cincinnati) convened an extraordinary public hearing in the Ohio state capital, Columbus, to hear testimony on her pending resolution (HCR 22) to address the crisis in the automobile industry by calling for Federal intervention to save the existing domestic auto industry, and retool it for large-scale infrastructure projects.

The hearing was called by Representative Barrett because of political intransigence on the part of the House Republican leadership, which has refused to hold an official hearing on the resolution. Despite significant political mobilization on behalf of the resolution, no date had been set for a hearing, so Barrett moved outside official channels to convene the hearing. She was joined by Rep. Dan Stewart (D-Columbus) on the dais, and later by Rep. Joyce Beatty, also of Columbus, who is the Democratic Minority Leader.

As Barrett's resolution acknowledges, over 50,000 people are directly employed in the auto industry in Ohio. Large-scale layoffs have already been announced by Ford and General Motors, threatening significant job losses in the state. At the same time, the possibility of a strike looms at the Delphi parts producers.

Over 40 citizens attended the meeting, including several dozen members of United Auto Workers local 969 of Columbus, and trade union officials from all over the area. Among those represented were the president and chief officers of UAW local 969, officers of UAW local 696 from Dayton; United Steelworker officials from local 1915, Fremont; state officials from the Steelworkers in Columbus; and leaders of the Plumbers and Pipefitters, Teamsters, and others. In addition, a Columbus official from the A. Philip Randolph Institute attended, as did members of the press. The LaRouche PAC and the LaRouche Youth Movement were also well represented.

Barrett's resolution is one of several dozen such resolutions introduced, and in many cases passed, around the nation over the past year, all of whom were inspired by a longer policy statement written by Mr. LaRouche in April of 2005.

Labor and LaRouche Representatives

In her opening remarks, Representative Barrett chastised her colleagues in the legislature for their inaction on the resolution, despite the massive plant closings that have "been going on for over five years here in Ohio. We have support and yet the resolution is falling on deaf ears."

"No one wants to see plants closing here in Ohio; we have

always been a leader in industry, and now we are losing jobs. Job losses in manufacturing impact suppliers, vendors and others. We have to make sure Congress understands this. They have done nothing for working people; they are moving too slowly to address the crisis. We have to ask the government in Washington to retool this automobile industry, to meet future needs. We do not need war between workers and the auto industry. This resolution will protect the automobile industry, and develop infrastructure."

The first witness was Merv Fansler of the LaRouche Youth Movement, who delivered testimony on the deep principles that must be affirmed if we are to solve the problem posed by the automobile and manufacturing shutdowns. Fansler cited the approach taken by Frederick Douglass in attacking the mental slavery gripping the nation in the 19th Century, and then went on to develop the critical principles of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, which state that the nation is charged with promoting the general welfare of all its citizens.

Fansler was questioned by Representative Stewart on how to reach out to young people to give them the information they need to better comprehend the crisis, and the solutions. Fansler responded that the issue really is not information, but rather the ideas to motivate the upcoming generation. He further called for collaboration between the auto workers and the youth, to reach out to organize the population, not simply over the internet, but in direct "street organizing" around ideas and policies to reverse the horrible effects of the disintegration of the nation.

Effect of Auto Shutdown

Fansler was followed by Mark Sweazy, president of UAW Local 969 in Columbus, who testified on the multitude of crises gripping the nation. He thanked the LaRouche organization for leading the fight to make people aware of the disintegration of the auto industry. He indicated how many other jobs were created as a result of auto production, viz. for every 100 cars produced, 100 other jobs are necessary, thus demonstrating the world-wide domino effect the shutdown of car production would have world-wide. He cited the cases of Mexico and Germany, countries he had visited last year with members of the LaRouche PAC, as examples of the impact of shutdowns in production. He was particularly upset in Mexico, where he was driven around to one meeting by a taxi driver who was an unemployed lawyer, whose case was typical of what is happening to the entire nation. "This will be our situation in the states within two years, if we fail to address the crisis," he said.

After blasting the courts for allowing the payout of over \$38 million in executive bonuses to Delphi officials, while the workers were asked to give back 60% of their wages, on top of all pensions, Sweazy then went through the urban nightmares being created by the already implemented "industrial downsizing." He made special reference to the cases of Baltimore, Md. and Detroit, Mich., as cities that are in



EIRNS/Joe Smalley

Ohio Democratic State Rep. Catherine Barrett (left), convened a public hearing on Feb 16 on the crisis in auto industry, after the Ohio House Republican leadership refused to hold hearings on her pending resolution, which calls for Federal intervention to save the domestic auto industry's capabilities by retooling them for large-scale infrastructure projects. On the right is Democratic State Rep. Dan Stewart.

advanced phases of collapse, because of the shutdown of steel making and auto production over the past decade.

Stewart questioned Sweazy for several minutes, noting that he represents many individuals who work at the Delphi plant that Sweazy represents, and that the workforce has fallen from over 5,000 employees, to fewer than 800 over the last several years. He went through the diminished resources now at hand in the city as a result, and made a direct jibe at the Federal government. "We have to get the Federal government off their butts! Neighborhood jobs are gone; union jobs are gone, the future of the nation as a whole is in jeopardy. If we don't have industry, we will be gone." He asked Sweazy what kind of jobs could be developed to help the situation.

Sweazy indicated the collapse of the nation's infrastructure desperately needed to be remedied. "Congress can develop infrastructure projects now. We can have water projects, sewage projects, and other things. We can build nuclear reactors, we can build more and more of them. We can ease our dependency on oil; we can create hydrogen right out of the newer kinds of nuclear plants, and this can run our cars. We can build new service stations to use hydrogen fuel. As for infrastructure projects, we can put some 12-20 million people to work. This will increase our union, and the workforce. We have to ask Congress to do what Franklin Roosevelt did: put people to work, bring our country back. We need Congressional action, call it a Marshall Plan, call it what you want!"

After several jibes at the inaction of state and Federal leaders, Stewart joined Sweazy's call; "People in Washington are holding hearings and sitting on their hands. We can put the country back to work. We have the plants, the resources, and the floor space for infrastructure projects, like water and other projects. This should be introduced through the Congress."

Representative Barrett nodded her approval, saying "You spoke about infrastructure, we must build it now."

Sweazy concluded his testimony by saying, "This infrastructure can be built. Ted Strickland (running for governor) has this kind of a plan to help the state. You put a dime in, and you get a quarter back, and you can educate the young people to participate in this."

The LaRouche Plan

Sweazy was followed by Robert Bowen, Midwest Coordinator of the LaRouche PAC, who went through the automobile crisis as a symptom of the larger international breakdown of the global financial system. "Mr. LaRouche warned of this crisis and has put forward the emergency measures needed to address this. Last Spring he pointed to the onrushing collapse of General Motors and the other domestic companies, but saw it as a moment of opportunity to rebuild not merely the auto industry but the nation. He focussed on the role of machine-tool production and the need to decouple it from the monetary side of the auto companies. He called for the launching of mass infrastructure projects, using the machine tools embedded in the auto industry as the springboard for a recovery. Yet, so far, nothing has been done!"

Bowen then developed the two primary reasons for this inaction: The refusal of the politicians in Washington to acknowledge the systemic nature of the crisis, and the need to shift to a producer economy; second, the lack of a relationship between the Washington "insiders," and their constituencies in areas like Ohio.

He then challenged the representatives and labor leaders in attendance to replicate the positive experience of last Spring around the mobilization to save Social Security, by holding town meetings once again on the industrial collapse and the auto crisis.

He concluded by citing the tradition of the American System of Economics, as something that must be mastered by all citizens, describing the successful nation-building approach of Alexander Hamilton, Lincoln, FDR, and others.

Rebuild United States by Retooling Auto Industry

Ohio State Rep. Catherine Barrett (D-Cincinnati) introduced Concurrent Resolution HRC 22, printed here, in the Ohio House of Representatives.

To memorialize the United States Congress to protect domestic auto manufacturers and to create a federal infrastructure development program to foster employment growth.

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Ohio (the Senate concurring):

WHEREAS, Domestic auto manufacturers, such as Ford Motor Company and General Motors Company, are suffering great financial difficulties and need assistance from the federal government in order to avoid filing for bankruptcy; and

WHEREAS, Ford Motor Company employs approximately 15,000 Ohio residents and General Motors Company employs approximately 20,500 Ohio residents, all of whom could lose their jobs, including health and retirement benefits, if the companies are forced to file bankruptcy and close plants; and

WHEREAS, the domestic economy and domestic workers would substantially benefit from a federal infrastruc-

ture development program where the federal government would finance the repair, expansion, and improvement of national railway systems, water management systems, and power and electric systems; and

WHEREAS, Domestic auto manufacturers' plants are already equipped with the appropriate machine tools and production capability to assist in national infrastructure projects and this assistance would prevent many plants in Ohio and other states from closing and experiencing subsequent job loss; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the United States Congress to stimulate and sustain the national economy and foster employment for growing numbers of Ohio and United States citizens who would become unemployed and lose health and retirement benefits if domestic auto manufacturers continue to decline; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the 126th General Assembly of the State of Ohio urges the Congress of the United States to protect the domestic auto industry and to create a federal infrastructure development program to utilize existing machine-tool resources and foster employment growth; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the House of Representative transmit duly authenticated copies of this resolution to the President of the United States, to the Speaker and the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives, to the President Pro Tempore and the Secretary of the United States Senate, to the members of the Ohio Congressional delegation, and to the news media of Ohio.

This challenge provoked a very positive and excited response from both Representative Stewart and Barrett. Barrett embraced the idea and said, "We need action. The crisis is not going away. It is time to connect the dots." She announced that she would begin holding other hearings around the state, beginning with Cincinnati.

Other Testimony

Bowen was followed by Delbert Cook, vice president of United Steelworkers Local 1915 from Fremont, Ohio. Cook testified on the impact of the collapse of industry in the state. He went through the collapse of the steel industry in great detail, and the loss of pensions and health care by the large number of steelworkers whom he personally knows to have lost their employment.

This motivated Barrett to say, "We have a great nation and a great state, and yet we are being ignored. People with skills and education are now unemployed, and not being put back into the workforce. We need change in Ohio and the country. The state cannot fund many programs to help people as we have no funds, as long as no jobs are being created to

generate revenue. This is a crisis, and we must treat it as a crisis. We built this country with our labor and we must address this now, and at the polls. We must stand shoulder to shoulder together and get this done."

A number of auto workers and officials took the podium after Cook to detail the crisis as it pervades the state. These included Tony Curington, vice president of local 696 in Dayton, and Rick Tincher, the Community Action Program representative of local 696. They gave eloquent testimony on the automobile crisis, and the need for a revamped trade policy, in addition to the infrastructure program. They detailed the horrible failure of NAFTA and called for a return to fair trade practices.

Other auto union members also spoke, and they were followed by Rep. Joyce Beatty, who praised Rep. Barrett for holding the hearing and vowed to bring the messages of the crisis and Barrett's retooling proposal to the Democratic House Caucus. She invited Barrett to be on the agenda when the Caucus meets in early March, to present her call to save the auto industry and revamp it along the lines that LaRouche has proposed.