

Where We Stand in the Battle To Save the Machine-Tool Sector

by Nancy Spannaus

Approximately one year since Lyndon LaRouche raised the alarm over the need to save the U.S. automobile industry, as the core of the nation's machine-tool capability, from extinction, the future of that sector hangs in the balance. On the one side, thanks to inaction by the U.S. Congress, the major automobile corporations are engaged in a huge stripping-down operation, savaging wages, health care, payrolls, and plants, and continuing to be pushed, by the financial powers-that-be, toward outright bankruptcy. On the other side, there is a growing political momentum within the labor movement, Midwest political institutions, and sections of the Congress, toward adopting an emergency program to rescue the auto industry.

Sixteen hundred organizers of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union came to Washington, D.C. Feb. 6-8, to call on Congress to implement "a new Marshall Plan for the U.S. auto industry." Their proposal said "the Federal government should provide assistance to help auto manufacturers and auto parts companies to retool and expand existing facilities." Their initiative reflected intensive efforts by the LaRouche movement, around LaRouche's proposals for emergency Congressional action to fund conversion of auto capacity to rebuild desperately needed economic infrastructure, such as high-speed rail, and nuclear power plans.

Some in Congress are listening. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), who cochairs the recently founded Manufacturing Caucus, and has asked President Bush to convene an "auto summit," addressed the UAW meeting on Feb. 8. "The manufacturers and the UAW have called for a Marshall Plan. Well, let's marshal our resources and get it done. . . . We can give incentives to retool plants and build more advanced and cleaner cars like hybrids and everything else." Senator Clinton stressed, "If we don't manufacture in America, we cannot sustain our economic position, now and in the future. She compared such a "new Marshall Plan" to the Manhattan and Apollo Projects, and emphasized that "the market" didn't organize America's response to Sputnik, or earlier to Hitler's fascism. She accused the Administration of "wanting to undo the 20th Century . . . to turn the clock all the way back to [before] the Roosevelt Administration."

Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) also addressed the meeting on his strong support for the UAW in general. He forecast

that the United States was going to lose 65,000-100,000 auto jobs in three or four years, but four to six times that many in the supporting glass, rubber, plastics, leather, and steel industries.

Despite these statements of good intent, however, the Democrats in Congress are still not picking up on the concrete proposals put forward by LaRouche, which would put the auto industry through strategic bankruptcy, and lay the basis for a rapid recovery through reemployment of auto's skilled labor on crucial projects.

The LaRouche PAC perspective

Over the last year, the LaRouche Political Action Committee (LPAC), led by the LaRouche Youth Movement (LYM), has circulated hundreds of thousands of pieces of literature outlining the means by which the auto industry can be saved. This LPAC activity has inspired political leaders in state and municipal bodies, especially in the Midwest, to put forward resolutions memorializing Congress to take the retooling action required.

At present, such resolutions are pending in at least six states, including Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Tennessee. Similar resolutions have passed in several major formerly industrial cities, such as Cleveland, Ohio; Buffalo, New York; and Detroit, Michigan.

Realizing that every week of delay is bringing more dismantling of the machine-tool sector, as General Motors and Ford, and their suppliers, shut down factory after factory, LPAC has undertaken to prepare a new organizing tool to build support for emergency action: a DVD which combines reports on the current devastation being caused by auto shutdown, with the historical example of retooling of auto which Franklin Delano Roosevelt carried out in the early 1940s.

In mid-February, Bill Roberts and Adam Sturman of the LYM carried out video interviews with a number of trade unionists and political figures in the Michigan/Northern Ohio region, in preparation for the production of the DVD. We include below some segments of those interviews, which reflect not only the devastation being caused by the auto factory shutdowns, for whole communities, but also the reserve of optimism about how the proud skilled-labor backbone of American industry, can be mobilized for rebuilding our economy, which still exists among the population of the Midwest.