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Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan comes to North American International Auto Show in Detroit
Mississippi community leaders reveal what's beneath the shine of Nissan

DETROIT - The Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan (MAFFAN), an organization representing clergy, elected officials, civil rights activists and students in Mississippi came to Detroit on Monday, Jan. 14, to reveal how Nissan treats its employees. MAFFAN members were joined by actor Danny Glover in a press conference that highlighted what is beneath the shine of Nissan.

“When workers at Nissan began to organize a union, Nissan responded with implied threats that they would leave Mississippi if workers unionized,” said Reverend R. Isiac Jackson, Jr., president of the General Missionary Baptist State Convention of Mississippi and chair MAFFAN. “While we welcome the presence of foreign-owned companies like Nissan in Mississippi, we will not tolerate a company treating Mississippians as second class citizens. The Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan will carry the message in Mississippi, in Detroit and everywhere insisting that Nissan allow a fair process that allows workers to freely decide on unionization,” said Jackson. MAFFAN was founded after Congressman Bennie Thompson called on Mississippi leaders to form a committee to stand up for Nissan workers.

MAFFAN members asked the public to look further, beneath the shine, to understand the issues in Mississippi and directed them to the www.beneaththeshine.org website to learn about the unfair treatment workers receive in the Nissan plant in Canton, Miss. The website includes a color graphic of a Nissan vehicle, visuals of the car’s construction and a description of how various workers in Canton were treated by Nissan while they built each piece of the vehicle.

Canton Nissan technician Morris Mock said the anti-union campaign at Nissan has been ongoing. “Since Nissan opened their plant they have been campaigning to keep out a union. The company does individual anti-union talks with workers including interrogating employees about their views on the union; they have shown anti-union videos; have held anti-union groups meetings; individually warned key leaders of our effort not to be involved; created a climate of fear by implying the plant will close; and demonized the UAW as a horrible organization,” said Mock.

Mock’s co-worker Michael Carter couldn’t agree more. “We need equal time to hear the union’s side of whether we should have a union at Nissan,” said Carter. “That has been our demand to Nissan. If you can show an anti-union movie for 15 minutes on company time then we, the union supporters, should be given 15 minutes on company

Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan

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www.beneaththeshine.org

time,” said Carter. The company is waging a campaign of fear against the workers, said Carter. “They imply the plant will close in speech after speech and in one-on-one meetings.”

Mississippi NAACP President Derrick Johnson says the workers’ efforts to have a voice on the job is a civil and human rights issue. “The NAACP and labor unions have long history of collaboration,” said Johnson. “The NAACP fully supports this campaign, and believes the campaign is a strong example of that partnership.” Johnson said Nissan’s treatment of Mississippi workers is wrong, particularly because Nissan has unionized auto plants around the world but not in Mississippi. “Mississippi workers are not second-class global citizens,” he added.

Students in Mississippi are a growing part of this campaign for justice, as well, and are mobilizing the group Mississippi Student Justice Alliance (MSJA). MSJA leader Tyson Jackson says it’s a natural fit for young people to be concerned about how the workforce is treated. “As young people we want a voice in what type of economy is being passed on to us,” said Jackson. “When one of richest auto companies comes to Mississippi and starts paying new production hires half of what regular workers make, and makes them temporary workers, that is unacceptable to youth,” he said. “Union busting is unacceptable to us. This is like Freedom Summer because this is a civil rights fight,” said Jackson. “The right to organize a union free of fear and intimidation is a basic civil and human right. The right for equal time is a basic right of labor.” Jackson said MSJA is focused on building MSJA chapters at many of the 115 HBCU’s (historically black colleges and universities) around the U.S.

Also at the press conference was state Sen. Kenny Wayne Jones of Mississippi. “As an elected leader, I can appreciate the concept of equal time,” he said. “I could never have won my election to the state senate if my opponent was the only one who had the ability to get his message out. Nissan must give these workers equal time,” he said. “They have shown anti-union videos. Union supporters should get to show six pro-union videos in return.”

MAFFAN members will be at the North American International Auto Show at Cobo Hall to ask everyone to look further, beneath the shine, to understand the issues in Mississippi.

For more information, go to www.beneaththeshine.org. To arrange an interview with a MAFFAN member, contact Catherine Gryp, (804) 675-8141, cgryp@crt-tanaka.com.

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