

Message to Nissan: Miss. workers deserve better

Written by the Rev. Isiac Jackson Jr. Guest Columnist to the *Clarion Ledger*

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When Nissan opened its plant in Canton, we welcomed the corporation with open arms, delighted for the opportunity for our neighbors and congregants to demonstrate their outstanding skills and work ethic. We provided generous tax incentives. Hard-working Mississippians dedicated themselves to making Nissan successful. I am learning, however, that management in the Canton plant is not treating Mississippi employees with the respect and fairness that Nissan affords its employees all over the world.

Nissan's conduct shows that it sees Mississippians as second-class citizens. Nissan is allegedly increasingly turning to labor contractors to provide "temporary" workers at lower pay and with fewer benefits than Nissan's regular workforce. These temporary workers work side-by-side regular Nissan employees for years, typically doing the same jobs, but without job security or ability to plan for their futures. Nissan also seems to lack concern about injured workers and pays Canton workers less than those at its other U.S. facilities.

Because of such workplace issues, Nissan employees began efforts to join the United Auto Workers. They see a union as a way to collaborate, cooperate and problem-solve with Nissan in a positive, constructive manner. The company has fought back fiercely, implying that it would take away jobs if the workers continued to stand up for their rights.

Nissan recognizes and bargains collectively with unions in Japan, as well as in Mexico, Russia, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, South Africa and other locations around the world. The company has formally taken a position to endorse global labor standards of the United Nations, which call on companies to uphold the freedom of association and the recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

It is troubling that Nissan is denying workers in Mississippi their rights to a fair union election.

I have spoken with Nissan workers in Canton. They say they simply want to have the same voice at work as Nissan workers in Japan and across the globe. Workers believe that with a union, they will feel secure to speak up about safety, quality and ways to make Nissan even better and more successful.

Nissan management is aware of our community leaders' concerns. Nissan has reached out to me and others to ask what they can do for the community. While it is noble that Nissan attempts to support financially various community programs, we do not want "gifts" and "favors." We do not want paternalism. Our dignity is not for sale. Our equality is not for sale. Our rights are not for sale.

We are calling upon Nissan's American management to abide by the global labor standards widely accepted by your company and other companies throughout the world.

Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan

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I, along with other representatives of the pro-union Nissan workers, will continue to champion this cause.

For too many years, the people of Mississippi were denied the dignity and respect that is our due as Americans and as human beings. The struggle for equality and fairness demanded sacrifice and struggle. We did not shrink from this challenge but rose to meet it.

My fellow citizens, we are on the road to equality, but we have not yet arrived.

Now is the time when we must summon our courage yet again to speak truth to power.

The Rev. Isiac Jackson Jr. is chairman of the Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan Committee.