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# Opinion: I've worked at the VW plant for more than a decade. Here's why we need a union

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by Troy D. Hunt

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Staff file photo by Olivia Ross / UAW President Shawn Fain speaks outside the Chattanooga Volkswagen plant as union supporters and VW employees accuse the company of union-busting tactics.

"I'm hangin in here like a hair in a biscuit."

That's what I tell people when they ask me how I've stuck it out at Volkswagen. When Volkswagen announced they were opening a new facility in Chattanooga back in 2008, I, along with over 20,000 others, submitted my application. I count myself fortunate to have been part of the original 2,000 employees Volkswagen hired (my clock number is 1,633).

Now, there are fewer than 400 of the original 2,000 of us left working in the plant. Their absence speaks volumes.

While VW has brought jobs to Chattanooga, working conditions and lack of employee input is prohibitive of sustainability for VW workers. From lack of time off, to unstable healthcare, there's a lot of room for improvement at VW.

Having a good wage is important, but workers also need to be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Having sufficient Personal Time Off is a consistent issue for VW workers. We do not have sick days, so when sickness or tragedy strikes, we use up the time we should have spent with our families, or end up working on the line while we're sick. Healthcare is another major issue. Right now, VW has total control over our health coverage, and frequent changes leave workers with unexpectedly high costs. This has caused some workers to forego important medications.

That's why I and a majority of my coworkers are forming our union. Volkswagen talks a lot about "continuous improvement," and in that spirit, we intend to improve our working conditions and turn Volkswagen jobs into Volkswagen careers.

This idea should not be strange to VW management. Every Volkswagen plant in the world has union representation except Chattanooga, TN. The company's charter states that they support human rights and labor relations across the globe. But when we talk about forming a union here in Tennessee, suddenly they talk about us VW workers as an "outside third party."

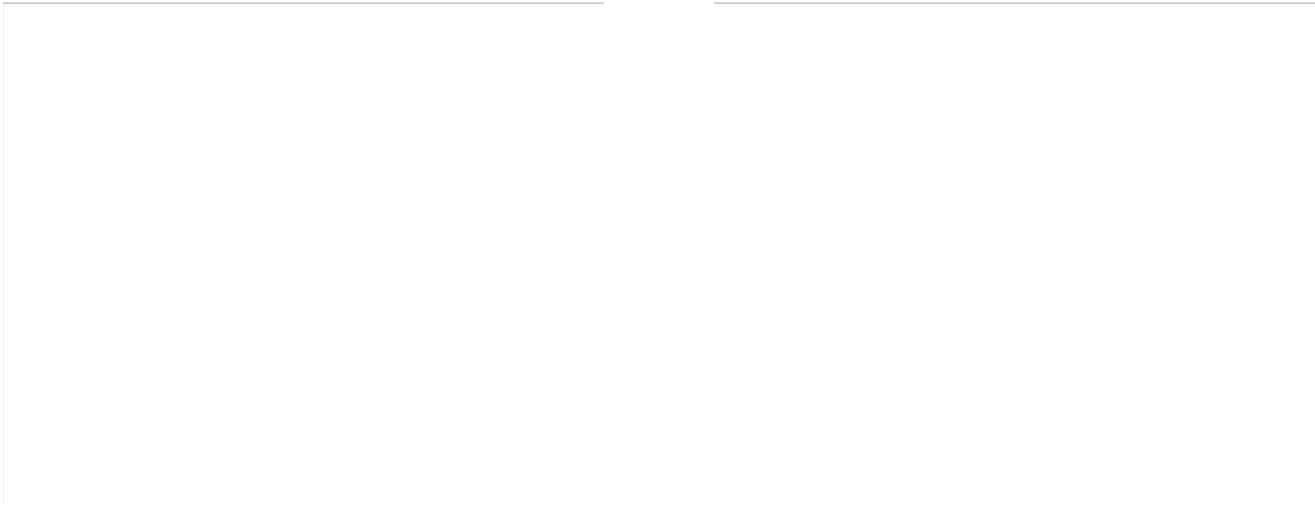
I have been a resident of the Greater Chattanooga metropolitan area for over 30 years. I have been an employee of Volkswagen since May 2011.

I find it ironic that Volkswagen has engaged 3rd party special interest groups like the National Right to Work Foundation to push the anti-union agenda, and then calls us the outsiders.

We're not outsiders. We live here in Chattanooga. We pay taxes here. We go to church here. We participate in community service, like the Wolftever Creek revitalization effort.

And yes, we work here. We are forming our Union to bargain for changes for the betterment of everyone. First things first, we need to form our Union, bargain our contract, and create a better life for Chattanooga Volkswagen workers.

*Troy D. Hunt is the Financial Secretary of UAW Local 42.*



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