
Interview: Phil Cavanaugh

'Our Tool-and-Die Industry Was Second to None'

Phil Cavanaugh is County Commissioner of Wayne County, Michigan, which encompasses Detroit. He represents Dearborn Heights, Redford, Garden City—in total about 142,000 people. He is in his third term, and has served Wayne County for six years. He was interviewed on Feb. 7.



EIR: Could you tell us a little bit about the history of Detroit? What sort of changes that Detroit's gone through over the years since World War II, up through the present?

Cavanaugh: Detroit has had a very rich history. As many people know, and fondly remember, back in World War II it was called the Arsenal of Democracy. When the Nazis were taking over all of Europe, and America finally got into the war in 1942, our country ramped up, and built airplanes, tanks, just anything they needed for the war effort, and it was built right here. Because of Detroit's positioning on the Great Lakes, on the Detroit River, its access to natural resources,

and its labor corps. People came from down South, people came from the Midwest. During the '40s and early '50s, there were over 3 million people in Detroit. It was a great place to live. It had great opportunity. It is the home of the three auto industries: Chrysler, GM, Ford all have their headquarters in Wayne County.

And over the years that has all dissipated. Today it is no longer the Big Three. Globalization has made Toyota, Mitsubishi, and Nissan all major players. It's questionable who is the top automaker at this present day.

Detroit had over 3 million people as early as the 1950s. The exodus started with jobs, and hence the people, during the 1960s. My father was mayor of Detroit from 1962 to 1970. It was a model city during those years, for its economic development, its renovation, but also for its racial progressiveness. My father was the first guy to appoint African-Americans to high levels in his administration. The city was, as the country was, going through a changing time. But the machine, the tool-and-die, the auto companies, were still strong. People were still buying cars. Our tool-and-die industry was second to none throughout the world.

There was Germany, Japan, and the United States, and the United States was seen as the frontrunner in the world. The best tools, the best cars. That has dissipated since then. There was a mass exodus of people and jobs through the '70s. And now, we sit here in 2006, there's a little over 800,000 people in the city of Detroit. It is questionable who the number one automaker is. The tool-and-die industry is gone, for all intents and purposes.

And that worries me, because in World War II, it was the Arsenal of Democracy. So, in war, we could look upon our

own people, we could look upon our own industries, to defeat the enemy. Now, if we have a war, America has all these planes and bombs, etc., but we don't have the tool-and-die industry, we don't have the mechanisms to make things ourselves, because we shipped that all overseas. We're going to globalization. But I consider it a national security issue. We can't take care of ourselves.

The auto industry's really hurting. Last week the Ford Motor Corporation announced 30,000 layoffs, throughout the Midwest. GM yesterday announced huge layoffs, dividend cuts. They cut their top executives' salaries by 50%. And it just seems like our President is fine with this. He says, our corporations need to be downsized. He has no problems with big oil reaping huge profits, where our tool-and-die industry is non-existent, and our auto industry is struggling at the best.

So, it was a better time when my Dad was mayor. Detroit has some promise. But what really worries me is the tool-and-die industry and the auto industry. *Everyone* is trying to redefine themselves. But in America today, redefining themselves means service jobs at Wal-Mart, or McDonalds, or gaming. Gaming and tourism seem to be most states' most industry. You can't sustain on that.