

What Unions Do

Thanks to the inaction of our government, Canada's auto industry is in a mess. And no surprise: the companies tried to take it out on the workers. The initial demands for concessions we received from Ford, GM, and Chrysler were outrageous.

As they lined up over the past few months to take shots at the CAW, commentators and analysts seemed puzzled about why we wouldn't accept two-tier wages, the loss of health benefits for retirees, and other major concessions. Get real, they said. There's no alternative.

I don't think they understand what unions are about. How we work. What we do.

A union doesn't exist solely to get higher wages for current members. We have a more important historical mission. And understanding that mission helps explain why we would never accept two-tier wages and many of the other demands placed before us.

Our goal is to improve the conditions of working people. Not just our current members, but our future members.

The first step in this task, of course, is to make progress in collective bargaining. When times allow, we win better wages and benefits – ensuring workers get a fairer share of the wealth we produce.

But just as important as progress in good times, is hanging onto our hard won gains in bad times. And that's what we focused on in this round of bargaining. This contract does contain some modest improvements: inflation-linked gains in wages and pensions, improved health benefits, an expanded new vehicle purchase incentive. But our main achievement was hanging onto past gains.

If unions give back in tough times the gains they made in good

times, then we don't make any long-run progress.

After all, the wages and benefits we enjoy today didn't fall from the sky. They are the result of the efforts of the men and women who came before us. They took risks, pushed the envelope, and walked the picket line – not just for themselves, but for us.

That's why we'll never turn our back on our retirees. We'll never sell out their health benefits. And we'll keep fighting at the bargaining table on their behalf.

By the same token, we must maintain a bond with the next generation: the young people who one day will work in our plants. We recognized two-tier wages not only as a threat to long-term wages, but as a threat to the union.

We split from the UAW in 1985, and formed our own Canadian union, because we knew concessions would never save our jobs. Since then, the CAW's membership has doubled. Workers in all industries view us as a powerful, credible force.

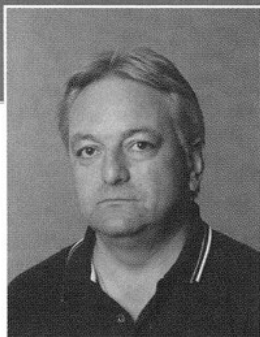
Whatever happens to us, happens to all of us: current actives, retirees, and future hires alike. We're in this together. That's how solidarity works. And without solidarity, a union has nothing.

I am proud to join with your CAW-Ford Master and Local bargaining committees in unanimously recommending this tentative agreement for your ratification.

In solidarity, Jim O'Neil

Message from Mike Vince,

Chairperson, CAW/Ford Master Bargaining Committee



Meeting the Challenge

These tough economic times are truly a perfect storm for the auto industry. The high Canadian dollar, rapidly rising world oil prices, a looming U.S. recession, environmental concerns, and Canada's growing trade deficit

have combined to make this one of the toughest rounds of bargaining we've ever faced.

That's why our decision to begin bargaining at Ford early was such a strong strategic move for the CAW.

Despite the challenges at Ford Canada its Oakville operations are in solid shape and we knew that the company didn't want a shutdown. Neither did our members.

Coming into this set of negotiations, our union was fully aware of the challenges Canada's auto industry faces. Our members know first hand the insecurity that has accompanied Ford's declining market share in North America. In this round of negotiations we managed to win a reprieve for the St. Thomas plant, keeping it running at least until September 14, 2011. Ford's upper management speaks highly of this facility, its workforce and it remains at the top of the company's list for new product. We intend to keep pushing for new investments over this extended time period, to ensure the stability of this plant for years to come.

Of course, this doesn't mean our work is finished. We need to push for new investment and products in all our facilities. The provincial

government's investment in the Ford Essex Engine plant was the result of a lot of hard work by our union and our membership. In fact, our Windsor engine facilities have now become Ford Canada's site of choice for consideration on new product.

The federal government now needs to step up and support this facility and other auto facilities in Ontario. Their inaction has resulted in thousands of lost jobs, devastated families and communities.

Throughout negotiations, our local union committees showed great resolve and determination to get the job done at the bargaining table. I'm proud to say that they did a tremendous job, despite the fact that the odds were stacked up against them. We now need to help our brothers and sisters at GM and Chrysler achieve the same pattern.

It's been a remarkable learning experience for me in my first term as chair of the Ford master bargaining committee. I want to thank our national president Buzz Hargrove and secretary-treasurer Jim O'Neil for showing the tenacity and grit that has done our union proud for so many years, in what will be their final round of auto bargaining. They have once again shown that our union has the ability to take on any challenge.

Our CAW-Ford Master Bargaining Committee and CAW Ford Council is unanimous in recommending this agreement for your ratification. Thanks for your solidarity and support.

In solidarity, Mike Vince