

Is This the Best We Can Do?

After striking for 12 weeks, Local 235 members are being asked to vote on a tentative agreement. Thirty GM plants are down, GM dealers are crying over the problems they are having—just last week the *Detroit News* carried a story about how one dealer had to take an axle out of a brand new \$58,000 vehicle in order to make a repair. Dick Dauch is a good poker player, but he's playing with lives not cards. He has threatened to take production to Mexico and China, but as much as he'd like to do that, he can't. Axles are too big and complicated to truck from Mexico or ship from China!

If you look at the tentative agreement, you see that what he wants to do, more than anything else, is to *get rid of the workers who have built AAM*. He wants to force out anyone who's got more than 30 years by cutting health care benefits for anyone who isn't gone by January 2009; he is dangling even more buyout money for the others.

Even those who decide to vote for this contract and plan to use the buydown package to have time to find another job know he doesn't want them either. *He'd rather just hire a whole new workforce at \$11.50 an hour, no COLA, no pension and few benefits!* We knew he wanted to get rid of us four years ago when we at Local 235 turned down 2-tier.

Here are the tentative agreement's "lowlights":

- 1 different wage scale within Detroit Gear, with production workers ranging from \$14.35 to \$18.50 per hour
- 2 different wage scales among Detroit Axle(\$14.35-\$18.50), Cheektowaga (\$14.35-\$16.50) and Three Rivers (\$10-\$18) production workers so that for future work the plants can be pitted against each other
- 2 no increase in wages over the life of the contract
- 3 instead of 5% premium, 2nd shift would get 55 cents per hour; instead of 10% premium, 3rd shift would get 80 cents per hour
- 4 pensions frozen as of January 2009; receive 3% of wage in a 401K plus matching additional contribution (But who will have extra money to put anything in to it?)
- 5 combining skilled trades into only four classifications and reducing their hourly wage to \$25-\$26 (This is a proposed cut near and dear to Dauch, who would be the first CEO to reduce skilled trades wages—the Big Three didn't, and neither did Delphi. If he carried this off, he'd have a big feather in his cap!)
- 6 added health care costs: weekly "contributions" will start at \$10 (individual)-\$25 (family) and increase 3% per year, 12 cent diversion of COLA each quarter for health care as well as higher up-front deductibles
- 7 overtime only kicks in after a 40-hr. week, not after an 8-hr. day
- 8 SUB fund of \$18 million (donated by GM) is limited and underfunded
- 9 new hires would start at \$11.50 per hour with no provision for COLA or even 5% in a 401K; only to get dental after three years. Most other benefits would not match current workers: less shift premium, higher co-pays, etc.
- 10 increasing the number of workers each committee person represents
- 11 eliminating the right to strike during the term of the contract for issues such as health and safety, speed-up, sub-contracting, and bargaining in bad faith
- 12 decreasing the time frame the union has to counter the company's plan to outsource from 150 days to 30 days
- 13 nickel and dimes a whole range of benefits including co-pays for generic drugs, capping health care for future retirees, tuition assistance

- 14 closing down Detroit Forge and Tonawanda Forge (while opening up a \$10 an hour non-union plant in Oxford)
- 15 removing Three Rivers from the no plant closing provision
- 16 shoving us out of the GM Umpire System, to be replaced by an inferior system of arbitration
- 17 eliminating of some holiday and vacation time
- 18 taking some of our products out from under the protection of the Successor Clause
- 19 cutting relief time from 23 minutes to 15 minutes

What Does This Tentative Agreement Mean for Dauch?

There are many UAW members who work for independent parts suppliers where wages and benefits are vastly inferior to the Big Three Contracts. Ever since five GM plants were sold in 1994 and became American Axle, we have been fighting to stay under the umbrella of the Big Three Pattern Contract. This contract is so different, we would lose that protection—it would be like falling off a cliff. The free fall will be extremely difficult to recover from later on down the road. This proposal guts the pattern and threatens to pull all Big Three workers down with their next contract.

What Vote No Means

If a majority votes no on this contract, what would happen next? The union would have to schedule a meeting to listen to what strikers want and would go back and try to negotiate an acceptable agreement.

But everything doesn't hinge on what happens across the negotiating table, and that's what's been lacking so far in this struggle for a decent contract. We have to put "street heat" behind the negotiations. This means:

- 20 increasing the weekly benefit to \$400 so strikers can survive a bit better
- 21 encouraging union locals to help with an adopt-a-striker program (benefit reps can locate the strikers who have special hardship, face foreclosure, etc.)
- 22 having the UAW International demand GM not accept scab parts from American Axle. A cut off of GM business would force Dauch to abandon his union-busting strategy. (This was successfully used at Johnson Controls/Ford a few years ago.)
- 23 building a support network (strikers, their families, friends, union supporters etc.) willing to commit civil disobedience in order to seal AAM plants—no scabs, no trucks coming in or out
- 24 setting up a speakers bureau and informational picket lines to reach out to all unions, community organizations and churches to spread the word about our strike and how they can help us
- 25 hold weekly rallies at the AAM headquarters
- 26 reschedule a massive rally at Hart Plaza

We have sacrificed over the last 12 weeks. Now that we have reduced GM's inventory, let's not stop putting the pressure on, but accelerate to preserve our wages and benefits! Let's remember solidarity crosses the generations of workers—we have what others struggled for. We can only keep what we are willing to fight for, and pass it on to the next generation of workers. The solidarity we have deepened over the last three months on the picket lines makes us strong—let's stay strong and reject Dauch's economic terrorism.

No, this tentative contract is not the best we can do. Send the negotiators back to the table! We demand justice and a decent livelihood!

Shifting Gears, Newsletter by and for the UAW/AAM Rank and File

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