

UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT - SATURDAY MAY 10, 2008

UAW President Ron Gettlefinger on WWJ 950 News Radio

Here is an unofficial transcript of the interview between UAW President Ron Gettlefinger (R.G.) and WWJ AutoBeat Reporter Jeff Gilbert (J.G.) about a new snag that's developed in talks to end the American Axle Strike. Time stamps appear that correspond to the recording.

0:00

R.G. As you know, last week, ah, General Motors went public and said that they had put, ah, \$200 million into American Axle, to help with the buy-downs and the buy-outs, which is something all along I was saying publically that I thought would be a mistake, that we did not want General Motors involvement.

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Yesterday our bargaining committee had responded, ah, to a company proposal, and, ah, the company met back with our guys, our lead negotiators yesterday afternoon, and gave every indication that we were extremely close on an agreement. Our guys went out to lunch, in fact we, ah, I was with them, and we, er dinner, I'm sorry, and we came back, and the company had gave us a notice, ah, that they were going to close the Cheektowaga plant.

0:51

So the bottom line here is General Motors puts \$200 million in these negotiations and American Axle's response is to us is that they're going to close an additional facility.

J.G. So that obviously is something that that is going to make the talks take a turn for the worse.

1:10

R.G. Ah, there's no question if, if the company, ah, continues

down this road it's going to make the talks, ah, increasingly more difficult. And let me just say this Jeff, without going into the specifics of the bargaining, and I recognize that, ah, the company's got a big, ah, PR push out there.

1:30

Ah, even there was an article I believe that came out in the paper on Wednesday indicating the positive attitude in the negotiations. Ah, they said that the bargaining committee had went home, the local members of the bargaining committee had went home on Wednesday, when in reality they went home on Sunday. We just think that was a ploy for them to, ah, go to the, keep their stock up. But we've made so many changes, ah, in this agreement, and I just want the striking workers out there, ah, to know that they're on that picket line for a reason, which, which they understand.

2:06

But this, ah, negotiations is very challenging. It's very difficult. I know it's been like a roller-coaster ride for our, ah, members who are on the picket line. And even to the point where our lead negotiator, we had, ah, scheduled a major rally, ah, in, on, ah, April the 18th, and we postponed that because, ah, the company had lead our, ah, negotiators to believe that we were extremely close.

2:35

We have literally made hundreds of changes, ah, in this contract and throughout these negotiations. And I mean literally hundreds of changes, all to the company's advantage, and they continue to push back for more and more. And then this, this last announcement on, ah, Cheektowaga is an insult. And let me mention just a couple of other things here. Going in to these negotiations, or prior to it, in the past two years, mid-contract, we agreed, ah, to Buffalo being phased out. And that's a major savings to the company.

3:15

We also negotiated a two-tier, ah, wage agreement, and we agreed to buyouts to help them. And if you look at the proxy

statement that was filed by American Axle, ah, the chairman and CEO's pay, ah, was based on the improvements that was made in that contract to help.

3:34

But since the opening of negotiations, ah, the company has refused to bargain in good faith. They continue to, ah, stonewall us, and, ah, they have by this latest move, this is an additional case, where it's actually regressive bargaining.

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J.G. So this just came out of left field it sounds like.

R.G. Ah, this came totally out of left field to us. In fact, ah, our negotiators who were here, and, and I'm here as a part of this negotiations, and we'll be here today, we'll be here on Mother's Day, because we realize the importance of these negotiations. And we have got people on the picket lines who we have tried very, very hard to get back.

4:15

But, as one example, in Three Rivers, members of our bargaining committee, in order to save that facility, will work, have agreed to a wage rate that is so low, that they will have to work for six months just to earn what the company gave their board of directors in an increase on their retention pay which is, ah, \$10,000.

4:45

So that would would mean that in order for our people to have to work that long to just get the increase that the board got shows you on the one hand the company's crying competitive, they're spouting a lot of rhetoric, they're playing a lot of PR games, but they're out to crush, ah, this membership.

5:06

And I've dealt with, ah, negotiations a lot in my lifetime,

and I have never witnessed a situation where there was more callous disregard for the workforce than there is here.

5:20

J.G. Now were you pretty much together on the economic issues before this came up?

R.G. Well, I don't know where we're at because the company changes their position, ah, every time we turn around. So, for us to say that we're together on anything, I have no idea anymore. Ah,

5:38

J.G. Did you at least think you were together?

R.G. We had thought that we were relatively close. In fact, I indicated to you, even the company told our, ah, second and third in command in the negotiations, that 'Hey, we are extremely close, very close.' They came in, like left this letter and then went home.

6:00

J.G. So where do you go from here?

R.G. Well, we're at the, we're out here, and I guess some of them are too, I don't know, I haven't seen any of them, but I'm sure I saw some of their vehicles out in the parking lot. They're here. We're going to continue to, ah, to be here, ah, to negotiate.

6:15

But, I'd, I'd think the most important thing here is, and again I want to stress that, ah, and I know that our, our members that are on the picket line, and I know a lot of people in the community that I've talked to said 'Now that General Motors has put that \$200 million in there, ah, you guys will be getting a quick settlement.'

6:35

Ah, I, I was hesitant, of, ah, even responding to that kind of a comment. I was very, very leery, ah, when I saw that General Motors had put in 200 million. We're dealing with some very, very greedy, ah, people here. In fact, I, I'm not sure not sure how they could even call themselves American, ah, Axle anymore. To me, it's more like 'Axle, Mexico and elsewhere.'

7:00

Ah, because they have, all the operations that they have outside of this country while they're continuing to close down operations here.

7:08

J.G. So do you think the G.M. investment hurt more than it helped?

R.G. I don't see, and I've said all along that, and I know that there's a lot of people saying we were trying to force G.M. to get involved. We were never trying to force G.M. to get involved. I openly stated, and publically stated that I did not think that G.M. should be involved.

7:29

J.G. But, in answer to my question, do think this made things worse?

R.G. Do I think it made things worse? Ah, based on this proposal that the company gave, ah, our negotiators last night, yes. I think it definitely made it worse because here now we're facing another closure.

7:46

J.G. Now how many, how many jobs would that eliminate if they got to close that plant.

R.G. Well, in that particular, ah, location it's a hundred and sixty jobs, excuse me, a hundred and sixteen jobs. But, ah, overall there's other, ah, closings that, ah, two others that have been agreed to in this, ah, negotiations. So, and it's not that we want to agree to a closing. But, it's just that, ah, that's, that's being forced on us.

8:13

J.G. What were the other two that you agreed to?

R.G. Ah, Tonawanda's going down, and Detroit 4 and 5.

J.G. The, the ones that that people have expected would close essentially then?

8:22

R.G. People had expected they would close.

J.G. So this is, this is a new one just totally out of the blue.

R.G. This is a total one, even, ah, ah, completely out of the blue, because the company had even, earlier agreed to move people, ah, a number of people from Tomawanda, over to, ah, Cheektowaga.

8:41

J.G. Now, in, in the past you've always said that you don't negotiate in the media. What is that made you decide that you wanted to go public now?

R.G. It's not that I'm negotiating in the media, and I, I don't expect anything. I just want, ah, people to understand that that \$200 million that General Motors put out there, the reaction by, ah, this company has simply been, to lay across the bargaining table another closing.

9:08

And I'd, I'd feared that, that as greedy as this group is, that when General Motors put more money in there instead of trying to use it to resolve the negotiations, that they would try to figure a way to try to keep it for themselves.