

# UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT - MONDAY MAY 12, 2008 UAW President Ron Gettlefinger on News / Talk 760 WJR Radio

Here is an unofficial transcript of the interview between UAW President Ron Gettlefinger (R.G.) and Paul W. Smith (P.W.S) about the ongoing American Axle strike. Time stamps appear that correspond to the recording.

0:00

ONRAMP RADIO BUMPER

0:11

P.W.S. Good to see business happening. We'd like to see business happening at American Axle. They went out February 26th. It looked as if they were getting very close. In fact, in the words of Ron Gettelfinger, the head of the United Auto Workers, he thought the union was close to a contract deal to end the strike against American Axle. And then Friday, something happened.

Mr. Ron Gettelfinger is on the other end of our line. It's been far too long. We've tried to be as hands off on this one Ron as we could be but it's time, ah, I guess to do some talking. Good morning to you sir.

0:40

R.G. Hey, good morning Paul W. Thank you once again for having the UAW on WJR.

P.W.S. It is our, ah, pleasure and our privilege Ron to have you and all the men and women you represent. I'm wondering if anything good happened, ah, over the weekend, because I did read that you were going to continue at bargaining, remaining at the bargaining table over the weekend although there was some confusion because it was said that you, that you felt, or some of your folks felt that the company was, ah, changing their position rather often.

1:10

R.G. Well we did meet over the weekend, ah, Paul W and we, we resolved some of the smaller issues. Of course, there's a lot of really difficult issues in front of us, and, ah, we're, we're here. In fact, our team was out here early this morning, ah, going over, ah, all of the open issues that are, ah, still on the table, and just trying to, ah, keep the, the process moving. But, yeah, we did get a setback Friday night, and hopefully we can move forward and, and try to bring this thing to a

resolve.

1:40

P.W.S. The setback being that, ah, there was another plant or two announced to be a part of the deal to be closed, that hadn't been, ah, I, maybe it had been discussed but you thought you'd gotten beyond that and it kind of threw you I guess?

1:56

R.G. Well, ah, no question about it. Ah, the Cheektowaga, New York plant, ah, they gave us, official notification on Friday evening that, ah, they were going to close it, and it just seemed very odd to us that on Thursday General Motors had give them \$200 million, and then on Friday they announced, ah, closing of another, ah, facility.

2:16

P.W.S. Yeah, it, it,

R.G. But we'll, we'll eventually get through all of this, ah, Paul W.

P.W.S. But I need, I need your help on this Ron because, when I heard, and we had Rick Wagoner on a few weeks ago, and I said 'Are you getting involved in the talks? Are you, your people there?' or whatever, and he said 'Well, it's not our place to, but obviously if it starts to really hurt us, then we're going to have to do something to make it clear that we need this settled.

2:36

And I said 'Are you, you talking about money?' and actually, ah, at the moment I might have been asking about if he's, I think I was asking about Delphi, if they were going to have to put up even more money for Delphi. I don't even know if we talked about having to put up actual money for this American Axle thing. But 200 million bucks seemed like a substantial amount of money.

2:55

And, when I heard that, I thought that would help you guys resolve your, your differences, and move toward resolution and getting people back on line and working.

3:06

R.G. Right.

P.W.S. How could it have changed it for the worse? Now I get the impression because of one of the quotes from the newspaper, ah, and I think it's specifically about G.M. coming up with the \$200 million, you say 'I think it definitely made it worse because now we're facing another closure.'

How would their \$200 million lead to the closure of another plant, unless, are you suggesting, that maybe, ah, American Axle said 'If you help us, we'll close this plant if you need us to close it.' or what? I don't understand.

3:34

R.G. Well, I don't either. Ah, and that was the confusion. Ah, we had already agreed on the Tonawanda facility. In fact, we were going to, had also agreed to take certain jobs from Tonawanda, ah, to Cheetowaga. And then for them to come around and say, ah, for Axle to say that their going to close, ah, the Cheektowaga facility through us way off.

3:57

But we'll, we'll get that, we'll get that behind us. Ah, we've, ah, we've spent, ah, Saturday talking about that among our selves, ah, and then exchanged paper back and forth with the company on it. And, you know, there's, there's got to be a lot of justification before they can do that. And we don't believe the justification's there.

4:15

I don't know if it was just strategy on their part, ah, or what it was. But the bottom line.

P.W.S. Do you think, Ron, Ron ...

R.G. The bottom line is, Paul W, we'll, and, and I, the reason I went public because I'm, I'm one that believes that you have to resolve your issues at the bargaining table, was because of General Motor's announcement of that \$200 million. The expectation was high everywhere, ah, that this thing was over. That it was resolved. And it's far from being resolved even as we speak now because ...

4:46

P.W.S. Do you, do you, I, I got to ask this ...

R.G. there are some very difficult issues out there.

P.W.S. There are, there are, there are. And for you to come out like this, I know that it's frustrating and bad, as I say we kind of stood back because we were so pleased at how well everything went with the big contracts and now we have these, these quote unquote little contracts that can be devastating.

5:03

And, nothing little about a contract especially when it's your company and it's your paycheck, and all of that, and your future. You know what I'm saying.

And, and I'm wondering if you have a gut feeling that General Motors has been more involved in this from the beginning, than maybe publically we've known?

5:20

R.G. Well, anything, ah, would be speculation on my part, and there's really no value in saying that. The, the reason though, Paul W, forget everything else, it's not about the personal feelings, or whatever, it was about the strikers, the pickets on the picketline. The people that are standing up, ah, for what they believe is, is right. And all we want out of this is a fair agreement. Ah, we have made numerous changes throughout this process, but enough is enough. And, we're trying to bring this thing to resolve.

5:53

P.W.S. But it seems that ...

R.G. It's going to be difficult. Look, it's going, let's not kid anybody here. No matter what we do as a result of these negotiations, it's going to be difficult, ah, to get ratified in our, in our opinion, and we're the ones at the bargaining table, ah, handling the issues. Ah, I don't know what General Motors' have done or haven't done, and don't want to even go there. And I don't know ...

P.W.S. I mention it because you ...

R.G. what American Axle's thinking. I don't even want to go there.

6:17

P.W.S. I know. But I only mention it because way back when, when we started, when we talked about this at the very beginning, you had said something about General Motors had built, had built up a supply, or stockpiled a supply of vehicles in, in being ready for this. And I remember saying to you on the air 'Well, you can't blame a company for being aware of what's going on around them, and preparing for, the, if there would be a strike.' But my, my other thought is this, it seems that, and I know it's not this simple, Ron Gettelfinger, but, that American Axle is saying 'Just give us the same deal that you're giving the other suppliers so that we can all be on the same, even playing field.'

6:51

R.G. Uh, hmm. That's, that's a good PR statement to make. But do the other suppliers get \$200 million from General Motors? Do the other suppliers have guaranteed, ah, pricing with double margins? Uh, No!, they don't have.

7:05

But, but set all that aside because you and I again cannot resolve this issue here. We've been very responsible throughout this process. We were responsible even prior to the strike. There's no question this was a forced strike. Whether G.M. built inventory up to support American Axle or not, or where American Axle scheduled their production, ah, we're where we're at.

7:30

Our concern is those, those strikers, those people on the picketline. Ah, you know, we hear a lot about, ah, 'We're not paying people for working.', well, what we want to do is pay people that do work. I mean, excuse me, 'for not working.', we want them to pay people that do work.

7:42

And you know we're sitting here struggling over wage issues that we shouldn't have to be. And I appreciate the fact that the, that the history of this company, the way it came about. And I recognize that one, one of the co-founders did take a risk here. There's no question about that. But investors took a risk.

8:00

And workers took a risk. And this company has, has profited over the years. Ah, it's made a lot of people at the top of this organization extremely, extremely, ah, wealthy. And now we've got strikers out there,

people that made this company, 'cause, sure, risk was involved at different levels, but somebody else took a risk. And when a worker applied for a job there, has spent the entire time that the company's been there there, they're owed something too. So, you know, and the, Paul W I've said this before too, this is, this contract negotiations has never been about trying to help this company be competitive, and if you want to use another term there, about concessions. But it's a matter of how far the concessions are going to go. And, that's what it's all about.

8:45

P.W.S. All right. We ...

R.G. And we're, we're here because, I'm telling you those are brave men and women who are out there on that picketline, and it's time people stand up and say 'Hey, Enough's Enough.' And that's why we're here, and I don't know, I would not predict how long this things going to go because, it appears to me, ah, at this juncture it may be a while.

9:04

P.W.S. Ron, we got to go. We appreciate you coming on board. We didn't want to bug you, but we had to get some, some information, and if there's more tomorrow or the next day, you're always welcome here, you know that.

R.G. Hey Paul W, you did want to bug us, you know that. Heh, Heh, Heh. You've called incessantly.

P.W.S. No, no, no. I, how many, have we .. No, no, no. We have not called you incessantly.

R.G. No, you haven't. I know.

P.W.S. We've called a couple of times just to let you know, you know, we're interested, but we're not pushing.

R.G. No, No.

9:25

P.W.S. We've agree these things need to be done behind closed doors, not in the media. But when they hit a roadblock, it's time to start talking.

R.G. Paul W, don't, don't wear your, ah, feelings now on your

shirtsleeves.

P.W.S. I never ...

R.G. Just kidding you. I was just kidding you.

P.W.S. When have I ever been able to not wear my feelings on my shirtsleeves? But I got to go. We really have a time crunch.

9:40

R.G. Okay, thank you for having us on WJR 760 AM - The Great Voice of the Great Lakes - The Paul W. Smith Show.

P.W.S. Mr. Ron Gettelfinger of the UAW ...

OFFRAMP BUMPER