

International UAW butts in

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The media and the public are misinformed about the situation at the GM plant and Local UAW 23.

What's not being reported is that our national contract agreement, in Paragraph 91, says that if anyone buys an existing plant from GM, the buyer is to assume the local contract for its duration. Our bylaws say that the local unions are the only ones with a right to waive Paragraph 91 and change a local contract, and that UAW International officials cannot step in, unless the local requests it.

This local did not request any intervention by UAW International. We voted no to the waiver to change this contract and that should have been the end of the story, but UAW International overstepped its authority and did an end run around us. This is why the meeting Sunday was so heated and anti-International.

I would think that the International would want to stay out of it, because getting involved constitutes a conflict of interest now that the International owns 17 percent of GM.

How can they tell us what's best for us if they have an interest in the company's bottom line? Does anybody else not see this as a conflict of interest?

I also know that there have been people vocalizing their disdain for unions, but these people are ignorant of just what the unions have done for labor over the years. Most of the health and safety laws were brought about by union lobbying. Many higher wages are a direct or an indirect result of union fights for higher wages.

A lot of nonunion workers are getting some benefits because of unions getting good benefits.

New UAW President Bob King said the UAW had to go in a different direction. I didn't realize that direction would be to turn the union's bargaining gains back 60 years. After all, wasn't the UAW founded upon better working conditions, higher pay and better benefits?

Looks like the International wants us to just roll over and play dead. We will not. They say this is a good deal for us, but I have yet to see where its representatives will give up half their pay and benefits. In fact, at this year's national convention, they voted themselves a raise. We haven't had a raise in about 10 years.

But our fight is not really about the money; it's about upholding the national and local labor contracts, as they were intended to be upheld.

People say we make too much money but never raise an eyebrow at the pay disparity between the top management and the hourly worker. It's about 300 times what we make on the hour. Years ago this margin was only 30 times the hourly rate. So don't tell us who's making too much; talk to them.

J.D. Norman, who wants to buy the plant, said he has to make a profit at this location this year. As I see it, he wants to take half of our wages out of our pocket and put them in his pocket and call it a profitability margin. I think this is unethical. If he can't afford one year of our pay and benefits, then he has no business buying the stamping plant at all.

I was always warned to be wary of union busters, but I had no idea that it would be the national leadership that would instigate it.

Gary Padgett, of Plainfield, is a member of UAW Local 23.