

Dear brothers and sisters,

Over 100 autoworkers, active and retired, with some supporters and family members showed up at the Autoworkers Conference in Detroit, January 23rd. Folks came from Lockport, NY, St. Paul, MN, Kansas City, MO, Toledo, OH and Michigan cities: Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Jackson, Flint, and metro Detroit. Many had not attended such a meeting before. Working members and young people made up a good portion of those present. There were a good number of African-Americans and some Latinos. Women who attended were very outspoken. Many were Ford workers. There were some elected local representatives.

There was universal anger at concessions and the sorry state of the UAW. Everyone seemed in agreement that we had to go back to our plants and communities and organize. Ford workers were asked to speak about what they did that led to the successful no vote. Victories for workers these days are so few and far between. The no vote at Ford clearly gave people hope that our self-activity can make a difference. A petition was circulated to the UAW Solidarity Magazine protesting the fact there was no reference within its pages to the no vote by Ford workers.

Workers came from the Delphi plants of Saginaw and Lockport that were bought back by GM. They are being pushed to accept further concessions and like Ford workers, they feel they have given enough! It appears their contract has been opened without a vote to do so.

The union on the shop floor has been so severely weakened that suggestions by retirees and high seniority workers on how to organize around issues like health and safety were important. Many new people said they went away from the meeting with new ideas on what they could do in their plants.

Jerry Tucker gave a thumbnail history of concessions that the younger workers particularly appreciated.

Congressman John Conyers spoke right after lunch, speaking to the issues of Haiti, single payer health care and the need for jobs. He is sponsoring a town hall meeting on Jobs and Full Employment Sat. Feb. 20th, 9:30am-12:30pm Teamster Hall, 2700 Trumbull, Detroit.

Reporter Joe Szczesny from the Oakland Press talked to people at lunchtime.

In the afternoon we broke down into workshops by employer/ sector which then reported back to the body.

Everyone agreed the union must be changed. People are considering running for delegate to the UAW Convention in June to speak out against concessions. For the first time the Convention will be in Detroit allowing for the possibility of organizing a rally to pressure the UAW leadership to stop cooperating with the concessions demanded by the companies and start standing with the rank and file members.

The meeting definitely had the feel of the Delphi meetings that were held in 2005/6. It was agreed to meet again at the Labor Notes Conference during the time space provided for autoworkers. Momentum for change definitely developed from the Ford vote. This is important. Let's keep this upswing going! Thanks to Jerry, Gregg, Dianne and everyone who made the meeting possible!

Wendy