

AUTOWORKERS

fight back!

AutoworkerCaravan.com

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Right to "Separate Ratification" honored

UAW 909 skilled trades vote "NO" on local contract!

In the March, 2012 ratification vote skilled trades workers rejected a tentative local agreement between UAW Local 909 and the GM Powertrain division. Local 909 represents approximately 500 production, skilled trades and sanitation workers at the transaxle plant in Warren, Mi.

Within a few days of the vote, the Local Shop Chair held skilled trades shift meetings to determine the reasons. It turns out that the skilled trades "no" vote was mostly a protest vote over the army of outside contractors working in the plant — a national contract issue. However, there were a couple of complaints about items pertaining to skilled trades in the local agreement. At follow up meetings, the Chair explained that the Shop Committee made the requested changes. Calling for another vote, he explained that the outside contractors had nothing to do with the local agreement and should therefore not be the basis for another "no" vote. The second balloting was held, with more "no" votes than the first round.

The Shop Chair held a third set of meetings, this time bringing in a representative from the UAW's GM Dept. As the national vs. local issue was explained, a motion was made and passed to recommend that the agreement be considered ratified — saving the local from holding a third vote. As of this writing a decision by Solidarity House is pending. During this entire controversy, management has been refusing to honor clothing and shoe allowances negotiated in the local agreement for both production and skilled workers, on the grounds that the agreement hasn't been ratified.

What about the Chrysler skilled trades "NO" vote?

All the above facts should be of great interest to skilled trades working for the Chrysler Corporation. Last fall, Chrysler skilled trades did the same thing on a national level that these Local 909 members did at the local level: They voted down the agreement (in both cases, the overall contract passed).

But the similarity ends there. Whereas the rights to separate

ratification by the skilled trades at Local 909 were (mostly) honored, at Chrysler it was a different story. Unlike the GM local, no meetings were held at any of the Chrysler locals to determine why Chrysler skilled trades voted "no." That part of the process was short-circuited.

Instead, apparently under pressure from Chrysler CEO Marchionne, UAW President Bob King held a conference call with local union reps just 16 hours after the "no" vote was announced. At the conclusion of the conference call the UAW International Executive Board huddled briefly and declared that the national agreement was "ratified" because "the reasons for the 'no' vote among the skilled trades were predominantly economic and not unique to skilled trades members."

Note the word, "predominantly." The vote back at Local 909 could also be described as being "predominantly" about matters not pertaining to the local agreement. Yet meetings were held, and the specifically skilled trades language was renegotiated.

Chrysler appeal has gone unanswered

Chrysler skilled workers, with the support of the Autoworker Caravan, filed an internal union appeal, challenging that decision shortly after the agreement was declared ratified. Six months have passed and the President's office has refused to answer the appeal. Instead, the UAW Chrysler Department along with Chrysler management are rushing ahead to jointly implement the terms of the skilled trades agreement that tradespeople voted to reject.

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Who We Are

Autoworker Caravan (AWC) was formed by an ad hoc group of rank-and-file autoworkers at the Big Three and parts suppliers during the 2008 economic crisis, when autoworkers were taking the fall for poor decisions by management.

AWC went to Washington DC to oppose concessions by the union in order to supposedly "save" the industry. Our wages and benefits amount to well under 10% of a vehicle's cost!

We have been taking concessions since the bailout of Chrysler thirty years ago. A month after the DC trip AWC demonstrated outside the Detroit Auto Show, and have done so every year since. Our cities still suffer from mass unemployment, for which the auto bosses are partly responsible—75 plants have closed in Michigan alone since 1979!

We've witnessed the escalating crisis of global warming, to which the auto industry has contributed. In addition to opposing concessions, AWC also calls for a moratorium on plant closings and demands closed plants be retooled and reopened to build green products, from wind turbines to buses and light rail cars. This can create jobs.

We believe that a job is a human right. We see the need for solidarity across borders and oceans. Workers in other countries—or from other countries—are our sisters and brothers, not our enemies.

All of these issues were drawn together in a "turnaround program" of several resolutions we submitted to the 2010 UAW Constitutional Convention. Our thrust was the need to "rebuild our fighting union." We think it's unlikely that autoworkers in foreign-owned plants will want to join the UAW if we aren't a militant and democratic union.

AWC has opposed concessions, particularly two-tier wages and benefits. Before the 2011 contract we held a meeting in Detroit to hear from workers about how two-tier has affected working conditions within the plants. We developed leaflets informing members that concessions were not needed. We exposed the injustice of a contract that left a huge gap between first and second tier pay and institution-alized all the rotten concessions from the bankruptcy modifications. Many of the plants that voted no were plants where the AWC campaigned.

We know two-tier continues to be a burning issue, and working conditions are deteriorating daily for all of us. That's why we're organizing a rank-and-file speakout meeting for late summer or early fall! Check our website for details autoworkercaravan.com

Fired for getting injured at work

Colombian GM workers demand justice

Those of us who recently attended the Labor Notes conference in Chicago met Jorge Parra, a GM worker from Colombia and president of ASOTRECOL, was in the United States to publicize the situation at their plant. You can find/friend them on Facebook

http://www.facebook.com/groups/116719295080402/, contact them by email at asotrecol@hotmail.com, or contact Parra directly at jjorgeaalberto@hotmail.com. We are reprinting an article by Jessica Hayssen, who was in Colombia last fall on a Witness for Peace delegation. — The Editors

A safe workplace. A voice at work. These are human rights that workers worldwide take for granted. Yet, this is exactly why workers at the GM plant in Bogotá, Colombia have been fired. The workers simply want to get well, have a meeting with GM to improve the labor standards in the plant, and most importantly, go back to work.

Since August 1, 2011 ASOTRECOL, the group of injured and fired workers from GM's Chevrolet plant in Bogotá, have had a tent set up across the street from the U.S. Embassy. They've flown the U.S. flag upside down — an international symbol indicating distress.

Attention they have received! U.S. Marines have come by and threatened them. When our Witness for Peace delegation brought it up at our meeting with the U.S. Embassy, they were told that the group should turn the flag right side up. We told Amanda Porter of the U.S. Embassy about the threats the group has received. She acted surprised and said it was the first time she had heard about it.

A few days later, ASOTRECOL turned the flag to its original stance to avoid further stress. However, they are not giving up.

Workers in the GM plant in Bogotá make Chevrolet vehicles for the local market. The plant's labor standards are that of 50 years ago. Injuries from the courageous workers who have come forth include: vertebrae hernia, carpal tunnel, joints/tendinitis, injuries to shoulders and elbows, to name a few. When we asked them if this was a plan to shut down the GM Bogota plant, they told us no. In fact, GM wants to expand and upgrade the plant.

GM Colomotores/ South America hired doctors which examined the injured workers and determined that the workplace injuries were not workplace injuries. The doctors recommended to the bosses that these workers be fired. So they were. And the corrupt labor inspectors signed off on the paperwork covering up the injuries.

According to the Labor Action Plan which was part of the Colombian Free Trade Agreement, over 400 labor inspectors were to be hired to ensure safe workplaces. To date, a little over 100 inspectors have been hired. In the case of GM, one of these labor inspectors was found guilty of corruption and was sanctioned.

Still, when the injured workers apply for compensation, the company routinely stalls all efforts to secure the documentation and further corruption happens. It's no surprise that more workers haven't come forth to claim injuries.

This is happening right under the nose of the U.S. Embassy. Colombian officials who should have been monitoring and enforcing the Labor Accords before the full implementation of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement have apparently failed. All of this this is being done when the U.S. still owns 26% of the GM common stock.

Greetings from UAW LOCAL 3000

I work at AUTOALLIANCE PLANT (AAI) in Flat Rock, Michigan. AAI opened in 1987 as the Mazda plant. We are a joint venture between Ford Motor Company and Mazda. This will be coming to an end this August as Mazda will move production of the Mazda 6 back to Japan. Once they leave, the plant will be renamed Flat Rock Assembly and re-tooled to make the Ford Fusion along with the Ford Mustang, which we have been producing since 2004.

Although we have been a one-shift operation since the summer of 2010, the plant is on excessive overtime. Members in our Body Shop are working 12-hour shifts. (We do not have any second-tier members at this time.)

Like most Ford plants, the hottest concern on the shop floor is the status of our EQUALITY of SACRIFICE GRIEVANCE; it is in the hands of an Arbitrator.

Because of how long the case is taking, many members feel betrayed by our International leadership. It seems like the case is being stretched out on purpose. It's one deadline after another, with

little information available.

Another issue is the Local Agreement. Union members voted down a proposed agreement last November by 250 votes. Our plant leadership say they are in "NO HURRY" to end discussions with management.

In mid-February a group of hard-working members circulated a Ford-wide petition to demand that Bob King and Jimmy Settles go to Ford and re-open the UAW-Ford National Agreement, restoring all of concessions Ford workers gave up in 2009. With just over 1500 AAI members, we have collected 790 signatures.

In March, I started a Local 3000 Chapter of the Autoworkers Caravan on Facebook. I try to keep everyone informed on the concerns of UAW members everywhere.

I hope everyone enjoys our efforts to put out an Autoworker Caravan Newsletter. This is a great way to get our message out and keep everyone informed of the events inside the plants and the political issues facing all workers. —

Jeff "Spike" Brown

Right to "Separate Ratification" Honored

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This is a blatant attack on union democracy and on the basic tenet that we, the union members, are the union. The ramrodding of the skilled trades agreement at Chrysler - and the refusal to answer the members' legitimate appeal, is as much an attack on the union as we are witnessing at the hands of the Republican governors and state legislatures in Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Michigan. Marchionne cannot be allowed to squelch union democracy! The UAW leadership must be held to account to stand up for the democratic rights of the membership and abide by their oath to defend the UAW Constitution. Frank Hammer, UAW 909, retired

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