

“Sale” and “Transformation” of Chrysler

The New York Times (Sunday 2/25) and virtually every other in-depth business analysis has assigned the responsibility for the current Chrysler woes to management: their bet that gas prices would remain low, Dieter allowing the pipeline of new products to empty out, etc. There is an excellent open letter to LaSorda circulating on the floor detailing the decisions by corporate and plant management that THEY alone have responsibility for. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Everyone in this plant has seen management decisions, focused on Harbour Numbers and the bottom line, undermine quality and production efficiency. Think spare parts; Time to do PMs. Inability to organize putting black paint on a few racks. Our new plant Controller is apparently as much out of control as the previous one.

Yet they demand that we pay the price of this mismanagement through concessions, work rule changes and giving up our job security.

They actually blame us for this “sale” fiasco that damaged both sales and morale and threatens quality. Our corporate leaders tell us that Chrysler is on the auction block because we rejected their request for health care give-backs. In fact, and unfortunately, the UAW Chrysler Department under Nate Gooden greased the way for massive concessions including health-care and GEMA provisions carried into the secret shelf agreements forced on engine and transmission plants. But when the UAW leadership reads the mood of the members and stands up to just one of Chryslers demands, suddenly our brilliant corporate leaders say we are responsible for the whole house of cards coming down.

This is a time we need leadership from the UAW. Instead we are getting silence, letting the companies, and newspapers provide the interpretations and alternatives for a membership understandably worried and trying to make sense of this whole picture. And this in a contract year where management has traditionally used everything they could—truth or not—to try to scare the membership.

There are some things the union must do to survive as a union and not just as a dues collecting agency. We must start mobilizing the members and get them involved around the general principles of solidarity.

No allowing them to carve up Chrysler without a massive fight. Equity companies sell off profitable sections and try to reorganize and flip the remainder possibly using bankruptcy proceedings to rid themselves of “legacy” costs and other “undesirable” union-won commitments. But this takes some time. All the units must stick together in advance. We have the

power now to make it very expensive for anyone who seeks to buy this company and gut it for a quick profit. By making clear our intention to use this power, we can have a big say in who bids and the future of this company.

No letting the company pit plant against plant let alone helping them. All work rule changes must be negotiated with the Chrysler Council as a whole, including Jeep.

No more two-tier agreements. We are all in this together and we will not sell out our younger members and our own futures to get a contract passed.

We must commit to mobilizing our membership for a massive organizing drive. We can only keep our wages and conditions if the rest of the industry is near the same level.

Talk is cheap. We have to do what we can do as individual members and groups of workers on the floor.

- Start saving money for a strike in the fall. If we are not prepared to strike, the company will attempt to roll right over us with the whole management wish list.
- Contact friends in our communities and other workplaces and ask for their support. Explain our situation—that our fight will determine what is considered decent living standards .
- File safety and work standards grievances .
- Call the local union and let them know that you are available to help on an organizing project.
- Fight for every bit of new skilled work that arises with the new technology. (see past and future *Meatballs*)

—Mike Parker

UAW Bargaining Convention Report

The UAW Bargaining Convention met in Detroit, March 27 and 28. The delegates elected for the Constitutional Convention last year were also the delegates to the Bargaining Convention.

How it works: Locals submit resolutions to the resolutions committee well in advance of the convention. The resolutions committee, and International leaders develop an omnibus resolution that is submitted to the convention—in this case a 103 page book. Since the convention represents not just auto but the entire UAW membership, the bargaining resolution presented to the delegates is designed to be a general guideline rather than specific contract language. The resolutions committee reads the resolution section by section and discussion usually consists of one delegate speaking “for” and one “against” from each region.

(over)

The delegates do not see the resolutions submitted by locals. The rules of the convention make it extremely difficult to amend the big resolution and therefore there was only a single vote at the end of the convention to adopt the full Bargaining Resolution without opposition.

The Bargaining Resolution has much of what the union has traditionally stood for, including improved wages, working conditions, and benefits. The emphasis at the beginning of the resolution indicates the changing times and bargaining context with the first two major sections: "Protecting Workers in Employer Restructurings" and "Bargaining to Organize."

Convention Speakers included President Ron Gettlefing, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Prof. Harley Shaiken, Governor Jennifer Grandholm and a representative of Level Field Institute.

Major themes of the speeches as well as the floor discussion were:

-We can compete but we are losing jobs because the playing field is not fair. Prof Shaiken described conditions in Mexico and China. Gov. Grandholm gave a fiery speech calling for "leveling up" not down.

-Leveling the playing field requires three things:
Fair Trade.

Single-payer, universal, national health care to take the burden off the companies that provide it.

Card Check and Neutrality to reestablish the right for workers to organize into unions.

-We can only win part of this in bargaining. Most of this must be won in politics and there were strong calls for electing Democrats.

The resolution book had a lot of good content. But frankly it was a toned down version of the same wish list the union generates before every bargaining round. It gave little guidance to where we will draw the line. The convention was very disappointing on two counts.

The resolution appeared to open the door to more two-tier bargaining under special circumstances (pages 19 and 34).

The reason that this is important is because two-tier destroys our solidarity and destroys our future. It is very seductive to bargainers and members so it is an easy trap to fall into. No one currently working loses anything and the company gets concessions it wants. But its cost

Chrysler at the Convention

There was nothing in the resolutions dealing directly with the recent talk of a Chrysler sale. In discussion and presentations in the regular sessions there were some references to vultures hovering, but no discussion of UAW strategy in dealing with this.

The Chrysler national negotiating committee was introduced including Local 1700 President Bill Parker who is the committee chairman. The committee met during the convention.

is our ability to fight as a united union in the future.

When you have two groups of workers in a plant doing the same work and one group makes \$10 less and fewer benefits, do you think they will feel solidarity with the other group which sold them out to keep their own better conditions? Will they have any interest in protecting retirees? And the older working group will find that management will be putting the screws on since it can save so much by driving out its higher cost workers.

Two-tier is anti-solidarity. There is a lot of sentiment about not tying bargainers hands. But on this issue we have to insist: they can not bargain away our solidarity under any conditions. If we have to take sacrifices, then we have to take them together.

The second disappointment was that the convention wasted a lot of time (as with the boring reading of the entire resolutions book) but did not discuss any strategy on how we will fight back against the companies.

With the recent spate of "competitive" concession agreements at Chrysler and at Ford, it is time the union stepped in and stopped allowing the companies to pit plants against each other. We also should have had discussion of the Chrysler "sale" with the entire union going on record as saying we will not allow either DaimlerChrysler or any buyer to carve up Chrysler. We should be holding meetings and making plans to make it clear that the locals will stand together and make it very expensive for anyone who tries to carve up the corporation, sell off some profitable sections, and discard the rest.

Mike Parker made a motion for the convention to have a session on "Organizing to Fight Back" arguing that this union is in a crisis and that we have to start figuring out how to get the membership reinvolved and mobilized. The speaker against the notion actually said "If it aint broke, don't fix it" and got support. Apparently many of the delegates are unwilling to see that some of our union is broken already, and most of it is breaking. If we don't act until it is all broke we will have nothing to fix it with.

Mike Parker
Russ "Spanky" Phillips
Michael Yanoulakis

Other delegates declined to sign this and presumably will put out their own report.

The full resolution book as presented and passed by the convention can be found online at

http://www.freep.com/assets/static/pdf/0327_uaw_convention.pdf

The Level Field Institute--a kind of buy-Big-Three campaign--presented an Auto Parts and U.S. Jobs Scorecard and other material of interest. See www.levelfieldinstitute.org