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Auto Workers



***the rank
and file
are on
the move***



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A FIGHT BACK! NEWSPAPER PAMPHLET
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(October 2005)

There is growing support and interest in the Members for CHANGE team of UAW activists founded in the UAW Local 974. A young up-and-coming union activist, Rob Wilson, and a 30-plus year seasoned veteran, George Cornwell, joined forces in early 2005 to make bids for president and bargaining chairman of the local. While the bid was unsuccessful, they utilized it as a launch platform for local union-wide and community-wide activism.

Wilson, uses his veteran planning and strategic skills to the advantage of unionism, while working to build community support – frequently writing in local area newspapers challenging the corporate propaganda and writing for the Local union paper on shop floor issues. George Cornwell combines the visionary leadership style with a worker rights agenda and an in-depth knowledge of arbitration precedence that wins shop floor grievances.

Caterpillar struck back at the growing rank-and-file movement by discharging George Cornwell in March, within days of his nomination for the Local-wide bargaining chairman position. CAT claimed 'inappropriate behavior,' stemming from a verbal altercation with management during a grievance procedure. Cornwell was performing his duties as Grievance Committee Chairman (a federally protected status) when the episode took place. He was reinstated to work on Sept. 19 and the group celebrated with the first of many Solidarity Day rallies on Sept. 24. ★

the Team Leader (Junior Foreman) concept to more business units, heavily recruiting from the underpaid UAW new hire ranks.

In dealing with workers the company uses the 'my way or the highway' and 'shoot first and ask questions later' approaches to disciplinary action. At times the company abandoned all forms of progressive discipline (like verbal or written warnings) and put workers on the street for the first offense and sometimes for minor infractions, especially for union reps.

Another slap in the face: The corporate propaganda technique of taking workers out of the shop on company time for reward lunches when a division meets sales goal. On Sundays in the Peoria area, the company has taken workers on chartered buses to Chicago for an all expense paid, all you can eat, day at the ball game. These are just examples of the corporation throwing crumbs to working people while shareholders rake in the billions and managers get record-breaking profit sharing checks at the expense of working people.

Meanwhile many of us, particularly New Hires, with wages reduced by 35%, merely wish we could afford to take our wives and children out to dinner in a local area restaurant. Many of the UAW members in all the locals from Decatur, Peoria, Aurora and nationwide drive distances of 60 miles (or more) to go to work at Caterpillar – yet with fuel prices ranging over \$2 per gallon the company has done nothing to help us. That does not begin to touch on the pain felt by the Morton parts division employees, referred to as Competitive Wage, who make far less than the manufacturing New Hire rate.

The company justification for the wage concessions was that they wanted to pay the average national manufacturing wage. The national average is arrived at by taking the highest known wage and the lowest and calculating the middle. Traditionally, major corporations like Caterpillar have made up the high end of the wage spectrum, which helps hold the average up. When enormous transnational corporations begin making average wages their goal, the average just keeps getting lower and lower.

Members Want Change!

Introduction

This pamphlet brings together some of the articles and interviews published in the newspaper *Fight Back!* on the current battle that has broken out in auto plants and union halls around the country. In the face of relentless attacks by the auto corporations and a policy of surrender on the part of a substantial section of United Auto Workers officials, an inspiring rank-and-file movement has come into being. And this movement is taking matters into its own hands.

As things stand, Delphi, GM and the other auto corporations have been forced to maneuver in the face of the rank-and-file movement. Along a similar vein, UAW workers at CAT are in motion, challenging the corporation that set the pattern for many of the attacks taking place in the auto industry.

An underlying theme of all these articles is that serious change is needed in the U.S. labor movement. Too many union officials want to 'go along to get along with management.' The result has been nothing short of disaster. We need to wage a fight in our unions and insist that the class struggle be placed at the top of the agenda. U.S. corporations are waging a war on the working class. This pamphlet argues that this war needs not be one-sided.

Mick Kelly, editor
Fight Back! Newspaper

Summer 2003

Interview with Billy Robinson: Auto Workers and the Big 3 Negotiations

The United Auto Workers (UAW) will sit down in August to negotiate a new contract with the Big Three auto makers — General Motors, Ford and DaimlerChrysler. Many union activists expect the negotiations to be characterized by concessions to management. Detroit launched an assault on auto workers years ago, and it continues. For example, GM slashed some 120,000 jobs in the 1990s.

The big auto corporations used to have in-house production of parts. Now, they rely heavily on independent companies. Many of these 'independent parts suppliers' (IPS) companies are, in fact, former divisions of the auto corporations. The workers there make lower wages and have fewer benefits. There are more UAW members in these auto parts companies than in the Big Three.

A lot of workers feel that the UAW officials haven't put up much of a fight in either auto or auto parts. One critical voice in the UAW is Billy Robinson. Robinson is past president of UAW Local 2036 at the Henderson, Kentucky Accuride plant. The local was locked out in 1998. The company wanted to reduce the workforce from over 400 to only 100 employees. They intended to raise healthcare costs and weaken retirement benefits. Finally, they demanded changes in contract language that would have made the union powerless on the shop floor: the grievance procedure would have been changed to eliminate the role of the union representative. When the workers refused, they were locked out.

Fight Back! spoke with Billy Robinson about the upcoming UAW negotiations.

Fight Back!: First of all, who is Accuride and what is the history of your local?

October 2005

UAW Workers at CAT Demand Change

Submitted by UAW 'Members for CHANGE'

Peoria, IL - United Auto Workers (UAW) members employed by Caterpillar Inc. ratified a six-year agreement, Jan. 9, 2005. Many union members called it, "The worst contract in the history of the union."

The contract creates what amounts to a four-tier wage system: Full wage employees (pre-1998), 'New Hires' (with a 35% reduction in wages), 'Competitive Wage' (at the Morton parts division) and the nationwide 'supplemental' employees (who get wages only — no health care benefits, paid holidays, vacation or sick days etc.).

The contract also forces workers and post-1992 retirees to pay premiums for health care coverage, as well as deductibles and co-pays beginning in 2006, ranging from \$1000 to \$3000. The premiums in the last three years of the contract are said to be fluid, with rates to be a percentage based upon the corporate cost of the premium which could be anything, considering it is the company's plan.

Making matters worse for unionism, the ratified agreement included UAW-endorsed concessions which sacrificed the union members' incentive compensation pay (a benefit worth far in excess of an estimated \$20 million per year) in exchange for marginally reduced premiums and co-pays.

Union members resoundingly rejected - by over 90% - a similar company proposal in April 2004. In August 2004 union members again rejected what the company referred to as its, "last, best and final offer."

During negotiations, CAT CEO Jim Owens was quoted as saying we need to eliminate the, "us — theyisms within Caterpillar." The company is plugging a 'one team' culture ideology, and according to them we are embarking on a 'cultural journey.' They have spread

Carolina. The Memphis facility wage scale starts at a whopping \$8.25 an hour - from a company boasting record profits and the best market position in the industry. If the Memphis facility survives the six-year agony, workers can earn \$10.50 an hour. Before we get too excited over this 'rags to riches' story, Memphis has been excluded from Plant Closing Protection.

Currently Cat is on the move to Mexico with UAW jobs from the Peoria area and salaried workers in the computer group have been outsourced to India. In the mid-1990's, when the Denver logistics UAW local voted to accept the concession-laden contract, the local union president committed suicide out of despair. Everything that union brother fought against, the UAW has surrendered, and without a fight.

What is in the future for UAW members at Cat? The only possible way to escape the 'beg bargaining' that robbed UAW members of the gains from years of struggle is for the members to organize and take control, local by local, and elect leadership that is accountable.

As a trade unionist reflecting on our blood-stained history, the sit-down strikes, the men and women murdered by the bosses' goons and police, the blood shed and tears sacrificed by other generations for us, I am angered by this generation of so-called leadership in our movement so willing to piss on that sacrifice. From the top of the House of Labor to the bottom, I am shamed by those who have deserted workers in battle, who have lost the reality of class struggle, and contaminated our precious union with mirror images of the Bastards of the Boardroom. ★

Mike Griffin heads the Illinois-based War Zone Education Foundation

Billy Robinson: Accuride is the largest producer of steel wheels used on big trucks. When they locked us out in 1998, they were out to break us down. The company lawyer said, "You can call yourselves the auto workers union if you want, as long as you don't do it on company property."

We voted down their contract offer and were out on the picket line for a year. The UAW wanted us to roll over and go back to work. When we refused, we were called renegades. Our strike benefits were taken away for 14 months. We built a campaign of solidarity across the country from rank-and-file workers and forced the UAW to reinstate our benefits. We fought for another year, and then the UAW decertified us.

Fight Back!: What is your opinion of the UAW leadership?

Billy Robinson: They offered us token support, but not solidarity among all auto workers. That's because the union officials are corrupt. Their pockets keep getting fatter, while union members are hitting the bread lines. Accuride provides the wheels for Navistar. If the union had said to Navistar, "you're accepting scab wheels, that has to stop," we'd have been able to force Accuride back. But the union officials don't want to affect the corporations' ability to make a profit. We can have no impact.

Fight Back!: What do you expect in the UAW negotiations coming up with the Big Three? Will they be characterized by trading jobs for retirement benefits?

Billy Robinson: The collective bargaining starts in August in Chicago, I believe with GM. The companies will demand and the union will give them the ability to close more plants. Large companies want a situation where they don't have all of their eggs in one basket. They don't want plants with 15,000 to 20,000 employees. Smaller plants make it easier to whipsaw [whipsawing is when workers within a company compete with each other to perform work cheaper].

The UAW has stated that they have given up fighting plant

closings. The executives will give management the right to close or spin off a plant without action being taken by workers at other units.

There is a long history of this. [UAW President] Frazier in the early 80's adopted 'joint language' with the Big Three that barred the UAW from interfering on the shop floor. The union can't tell the rank and file to be involved in labor disputes at other units.

The union will make retirement benefits a priority. Any time retirement benefits are mentioned, however, it needs to be understood as part of a larger movement. Defending retirement benefits doesn't mean defending the company's profits. Remember, the auto workers don't have defined pension plans. The pension plan is primarily in stocks and bonds. Your pension can go up, down or away.

Fight Back!: What will these negotiations mean for workers in the auto parts industry?

Billy Robinson: The UAW will allow the Big Three more ability to spin off parts of the industry, like Delphi. They'll allow more two and three-tiered wage scales. These two-tier wage scales break down solidarity.

Fight Back!: What should auto workers demand out of these negotiations?

Billy Robinson: Our rallying cry should include that everyone should have the same benefits. There should be one contract that covers everybody. Don't give up any more union benefits. No two-tiered wage scales.

Fight Back!: What's next in your struggle to turn the UAW into a union that's true to the working class?

Billy Robinson: I've formed a group called LAWS – Labor Advocates for Workers' Solutions, issues and communications. We hope to bring together all those forces that are working to reform

three years of struggle. The regional director over the Accuride workers during that struggle is now the International President of the UAW.

The newly ratified Caterpillar contract has few changes over the previous offer - other than negative. Caterpillar, without blinking, never put another nickel on the table but shifted costs to different groups of employees. Why would they give something up, with all the white flags the UAW threw up? Incentive bonuses were shifted to the 'bone us' column to cover health care costs. Insurance costs for certain retirees were lowered some, but continue to rise throughout the life of the agreement. Part of that cost will come from working members who previously had paid insurance. Temporary employees remain third world members of the UAW. No benefits, no representation and no retirement; no hope! New hires are allowed to become full time under this agreement, but do not fare much better. The current 'supplemental employees' at labor grade 2, step 3, for example, have a base wage of \$15.37 an hour. In the same grade and step if they convert to 'new hires,' they will be paid \$12.50 an hour. The same pay for current employees is \$20.44 an hour. New hires will receive benefits, which they now have to pay for, but no retirement! New hires will have a 401k, which they must pay into and are not a reliable source of retirement income. The August 2004 offer gave new hires the option of a 401k or the Caterpillar retirement.

Cat currently has more than 1100 supplemental employees, representing nearly 15% of their workforce and has offered early retirement windows for current employees. By the time this contract expires, Caterpillar may well be close to ending its defined pension plan. That is a giant step backward for any union, roughly 60 years backward. New hires will in many instances be working for \$10.00 an hour less than current employees. Considering that most U.S. workers are working for 1979 level wages today, Cat has relegated its employees to poverty.

The parts division of Caterpillar, now known as Logistic Services, is paid so low after the 1998 agreement, some members are eligible for food stamps. York, Pennsylvania has only a few UAW members left. Cat has shifted most of those jobs to North

In Decatur, in spite of weak leadership, the savvy rank and file of Local 751 rejected both the national agreement and the local agreements, by a margin of nearly two to one. Local 751 in Decatur however, does not have enough votes to vote down the master agreement for all Cat workers

The militancy in Decatur can be attributed to past leaders who had the courage to stand up to Cat and the UAW. It was in Decatur – where more than six years ago workers voted down offers by Cat and the UAW that left nearly 200 discharged members out in the cold – that the master agreement failed. Caterpillar and the UAW were forced to return to the bargaining table and reach an agreement that included the discharged members, in spite of the fact the national UAW said there was no more to be gained. UAW members honored their heroes while the ‘mighty UAW’ international union was willing to desert them.

National and local UAW leaders became the choir of despair with chants of, “This is not the time,” and, “This is the best we can do under these circumstances,” without clearly defining when the right time would be or what the right circumstances were. Cat began kicking the UAW in 1992 and continued until 1998 when a six-year concessionary agreement was finally reached. This agreement will continue the beating for six more years. Do the math. Eighteen years of, “This is not the right time.” How much longer will it take? Never!

In the past two decades the UAW has been on a path to destruction through its ‘jointism’ - partnerships with employers - and a variety of other schemes that mimic company unionism. Not one of those schemes has halted the massive losses in membership suffered by the UAW. When the UAW does circle the wagons, the employers are allowed to join the circle. Such was the case at Accuride Wheel in Henderson, Kentucky a few years ago. When UAW Local 2036 refused to accept a horrible contract offer, the UAW, after informing the company first, cut off strike benefits to the 600-plus member local. After an embarrassing picket of UAW headquarters in Detroit, curiously named ‘Solidarity House’, the UAW reinstated benefits to locked-out workers. Months later the UAW decertified the local and walked away, leaving those members without jobs, union membership, or hope, after more than

the UAW. The network of solidarity activists in the union were instrumental in getting the UAW to restore our benefits during the lockout at Accuride. We need to be unified to hold our leaders accountable. ★

December 2005

Delphi Workers Fan Flames of Labor's Renewal

By Rob Wilson

After decades of concessionary contracts, rank-and-file United Auto Worker activists have worked tirelessly the last two months resisting attacks on auto parts workers at Delphi Corporation.

Delphi filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on Oct. 8. With Steve 'The Hatchet' Miller, CEO of Delphi, at the helm, the company blames health care payments for retirees and labor costs as factors contributing to Delphi's financial crisis. Approximately 24,000 General Motors workers were sold out in 1999, when GM spun off parts manufacturing and created Delphi Corporation. Now Delphi is trying to renege on collective bargaining agreements and pensions that they are obligated to pay. The company is asking for enormous benefits concessions and wage reductions - from \$27 an hour down to \$9 an hour - or it will ask a bankruptcy judge to nullify the contracts with UAW-represented employees.

Since early November, auto workers across the nation have rallied to what some union officials are calling 'rebel' rank and file meetings. The meetings were initially called by Gregg Shotwell, a longtime UAW activist and Delphi worker. The meetings began in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Nov. 6. The Nov. 6 meeting saw hundreds of UAW members from across the auto industry, including General Motors, Ford, Visteon, Chrysler, Caterpillar and John Deere, who came to hear and voice concerns.

Another meeting held Nov. 13, in Kokomo, Indiana saw another good crowd of concerned workers from the local area and across the nation. December meetings were held in Saginaw on Dec. 4 and in Flint on the 11th. During the Saginaw meeting an open motion was made from the floor to adopt a name for this workers' movement. They unanimously approved the name "Soldiers of

March / April 2005

United Auto Workers Brutalized at Caterpillar

By Mike Griffin, War Zone Education Foundation

Decatur, IL - Sunday, Jan. 9 proved to be a day of infamy for United Auto Workers members worldwide. The fallout from the new six-year contract with Caterpillar will ultimately touch the lives of every member, active or retired. Without any fight or any known strategy, United Auto Workers (UAW) leadership surrendered any hope of recovery at Caterpillar Inc.

The devastating contract passed by a narrow 59% margin after UAW international representatives told members that, in the event of a strike, they would be permanently replaced, or that Cat could move production to Dixie. In a shameful effort to secure a yes vote, the gloves came off and the threats flourished. Members say the informational meeting in Peoria, Illinois before the vote became so unruly after an international rep was booed off the stage, the meeting was cut short and the voting began.



Mike Griffin, left, at a march for workers' rights

“for as long as it takes,” was none other than Ron Gettlefinger, current UAW International President.

This past year, Gettlefinger negotiated a poverty-level contract at a parts supplier in Indiana that allowed some members to move to another facility and maintain current wages and benefits, but denied those members the right to vote on the contract. In spite of the UAW constitution, Gettlefinger has played a major role in forcing UAW members to work under conditions that place them at the poverty level. A rank and file resurgence is now threatening his poor leadership and his credibility with the executives in the big three. Gettlefinger’s occasional militant speech now rings hollow with UAW members – and it should. His history is one of defeat, maybe even betrayal, and the gruff persona he portrays, hypocritical. One is reminded more of the blowhard caricature, Yosemite Sam, than Walter Ruether.

The growing rank and file movement in the UAW has its work cut out. The auto corporations are out for blood. It’s time UAW members take things in their own hands. ★

Solidarity” and decided to create buttons featuring such slogans as S.O.S. and WTR, for ‘work to rule.’

The meetings have not only focused on the crisis but on direct shop floor actions such as ‘work to rule.’ Work to rule emphasizes building communication on the shop floor and building solidarity among workers by strict adherence corporate and safety regulations. Following these rules to the letter has the effect of slowing production.

The meetings also talked about preparing for a strike and working without a contract. Larry Solomon, former President of Local 751 and present Chairman of Solidarity Now and George Cornwell, a UAW Local 974 Grievance Committeeman - both UAW veterans of the mid-1990s labor war with Caterpillar Incorporated - talked about their experiences working without a contract and work to rule.

The crowds at these mass meetings have been diverse, drawing from across the auto industry. The mood of the attendees is that a great battle is coming their way and the consensus is that every concessionary contract sets precedence for the corporations’ demanding more concessions. The broad-based support and concern prompted Shotwell to open the December meetings up to all workers, union and non-union, who are concerned for the Delphi situation.

For decades auto workers have enjoyed the fruits of the previous generations’ efforts and now there is a call from many at the meetings for a broad social movement uniting all workers and every faction with interests tied to the current corporate warfare against working people. While the labor movement has always emphasized political action, many people voice tremendous distrust for all the politicians within the current two-party system. Feeling betrayed by the Democratic party, many believe that only a united nationwide movement will force political change.

Rank-and-file auto workers plan to picket the Detroit auto show on Jan. 8, the showcase event in the automotive capital. Subsequent meetings are planned for Milwaukee, Jan. 15 and an unconfirmed date for Troy, Michigan in late January. ★

January 2006

Auto Workers Stand Up to Attacks Interview with Rank-and-File Leader Gregg Shotwell

Fight Back! interviewed Gregg Shotwell, a key leader of the rank-and-file movement that is growing inside the United Auto Workers. A worker at the Delphi auto parts plant in Cooperstown, Michigan, Shotwell helped organize the mass meetings of auto workers that took place over the past two months. These meetings led to the formation of the rank-and-file organization, Soldiers of Solidarity.

Delphi workers make auto parts for General Motors and for all practical purposes the two companies are the same. Delphi has filed for bankruptcy. Bankruptcy courts are used by many corporations - for example those of the airline industry - as a vehicle to escape union contracts, slash health benefits and gut pensions.

This rank-and-file upsurge in auto has put the heat on UAW President Ron Gettelfinger. On Dec. 30 the Wall Street Journal noted, "Growing resistance from auto workers is putting pressure on the head of the industry's most powerful union and threatening the tenuous ties he has forged with Detroit's Big Three."

As *Fight Back!* goes to press, negotiations concerning Delphi workers are continuing between the UAW and GM.

Fight Back!: General Motors and Delphi are pushing for huge concessions. What do they want from Delphi workers?

Gregg Shotwell: Cheap labor. Delphi wants to dump their obligations to retirees - pensions and health insurance - onto the taxpayers. Delphi also wants to cut our wages in half, reduce benefits, close plants and lay off workers. But it's not just about the money. Delphi wants to break the union by imposing a contract that would make our day-to-day life in the factory miserable. Delphi does not want to honor seniority rights or human rights. For example, no excuses would be accepted for absence from work and discipline would not be grievable.

the discharged members. The largest local, 974 in Peoria, Illinois, voted in favor, after the former local president, Jerry Brown, who vowed never to accept it, was given an international union job and returned to sell the contract.

Perhaps the defining element in the Caterpillar battle was the treatment of the parts division. Thousands of jobs were lost; benefits were cut and most alarming, tiered were wages so low UAW members were eligible for food stamps. The distribution center in York, Pennsylvania was mostly moved to a new nonunion facility in North Carolina. So horrible was the sellout, the local president in Denver, Colorado, Joe Vasquez, committed suicide when his members voted to accept it. During the dispute at CAT, the John Deere contract was settled under similar conditions without so much as a whimper from the UAW.

Both contracts were negotiated under the direction of Richard Shoemaker, who headed the agriculture-implement division of the UAW. Both contracts gave a glimpse of the future for the parts divisions in the auto industry and showed where UAW leadership stood on the issues and who they were standing with.

In 1998 another struggle took shape in Henderson, Kentucky, involving UAW Local 2036 and Accuride Wheel, a parts supplier. After a short strike and return to work, Accuride locked out the 650 members of Local 2036. Accuride demanded a contract no union could agree to, except of course, the UAW.

After more than a year of paying strike benefits, the UAW told Accuride (a week before they told Local 2036 leaders) that they were ending strike benefits to local members. Maintaining wages and benefits at this parts supplier would go against the concessions at CAT, John Deere and where the auto industry was headed.

Local activists and supporters from across America organized a picket of the UAW headquarters in Detroit. Yokich responded to the embarrassment by restoring benefits at double the rate, but only for several months. Less than a year later, Yokich decertified the local and handed the jobs of 650 loyal UAW members over to scabs forever. Many of those members, including local President Billy Robinson, had helped build the 22-year-old local from the ground up. The UAW Regional Director who vowed to stay with the local,

Looking back at the UAW and its transformation from a fighting union to one of compliance, partnership and 'jointism' with the employing class we find a sorry record.

Doug Frazier became UAW president in 1977. He joined Chrysler's board of directors and defined the path of destruction the UAW would follow. But no UAW leadership team could equal the incompetence of Frazier's successor, Owen Beiber, who took over in 1983. Rather than fight for UAW members, he immersed the UAW in jointism – labor/management cooperation schemes that signaled to the auto corporations that the UAW was an easy mark. Under Beiber, the policy concessions, now so vivid in the Delphi debacle, took root in the agriculture and implement division of the UAW at Caterpillar Tractor and John Deere.

In 1992, the UAW struck CAT only to voluntarily return months later. Tiered wages, erosion of benefits for retirees, health care cost-shifting and attacks on the parts division were at the center of the dispute. The struggle continued more than six years while UAW members worked under imposed conditions. During the dispute, UAW President Beiber retired, passing the briefcase to Stephen Yokich. Caterpillar amassed a record 450-plus labor violations, many of which involved 250 illegally terminated employees - bargaining chips for a ruthless corporation. So confident was Don Fites, CAT CEO, that he could cut a deal, he openly boasted the company would be vindicated of all charges. How could he have known this unless he was receiving assurances from UAW leadership? During the length of the dispute, it was clear the UAW had no winning strategy and was doing nothing to secure a victory.

In 1995, at the AFL-CIO convention in New York, President Yokich stood before Decatur, Illinois unionists, including UAW local leaders from CAT announcing, "I will not hold up a contract for thousands of UAW members for a few hundred discharges." Most of those discharged had done nothing wrong, but Yokich was willing to sell them out, angering Decatur unionists.

At CAT, Yokich forced a vote on a sellout contract several times, but a savvy rank and file rejected it – insisting discharged members be returned to work. The Decatur local, under the leadership of Larry Solomon, was key in rejecting attempts to settle without justice for

Fight Back!: Rank-and-file meetings of auto workers have drawn large numbers and the organization Soldiers of Solidarity has emerged from these mass meetings. Why such an enthusiastic response? What are the goals of Soldiers of Solidarity?

Shotwell: The enthusiasm is a direct result of two things: One, the severity of the threat and two, the lack of a strong response from the leadership of the UAW to the threat.

In the meetings we turn control over to the members. People who never had a voice before are given an opportunity to speak their minds to an attentive audience of peers. Participation is direct and energetic. It makes for an exciting atmosphere.

Our goals are simply to resist concessions and to exert rank-and-file power by involving all the members in an organized effort to assert our dignity. We are not helpless victims. We control production. We can make or break profits. We have power.

Fight Back!: A call has been made to 'Work to Rule.' Practically speaking what has this meant?

Shotwell: Work to Rule is a method of challenging management control by insisting that all rules - safety, production and quality standards - be observed to the letter of the law.

When we Work to Rule we stop giving the boss that extra effort that makes the difference between profit and loss. We withhold our knowledge because the bosses do not show us respect. We used to give a baker's dozen for the price of twelve. But with Work to Rule the boss gets just what he deserves.

It's simple. The machine stops. The boss says, "What's wrong?" I say, "I don't know." He asks the job setter who replies, "I don't know." He asks another coworker who replies, "I don't know." Then we all look at the boss and he starts sweating because he really doesn't know.

Bosses like to boss. So do them all a favor and give them lots of bossing to do. The boss will like you for it and everyone will be happy keeping labor costs down by outsourcing all decisions to the boss.

Work to Rule is safe and legal because we insist on following every rule and code in the book. We observe the high quality standards that the bosses demand. We observe all the safety procedures that the laws demand. The result is a slowdown in production but by the bosses orders, not ours. We just do what we are told, no more, no less.

Fight Back!: Do you think it will be necessary to strike against Delphi and/or GM? Why or why not?

Shotwell: The president of the UAW has stated that it appears we are on “a collision course” with Delphi. GM and Delphi are one and the same. We have to impact both companies to reach a fair agreement. I believe a strike is inevitable because GM-Delphi is determined to impose drastic wage and benefit reductions and to severely weaken our union.

If we do not fight back and resist this anti-worker agenda, I believe that all workers, not just auto workers, will suffer.

Full employment is a workable reality. A living wage is simple justice. Security in our old age is a fair reward for a life of labor. A national insurance plan that covers everyone is the only reasonable solution to the medical crisis in America. Health care is a human right.

A nation’s prosperity depends on a system of just rewards, not the degradation of the working class. ★

April / May 2006

The United Auto Workers: Sellouts vs. Rank and File Militancy

By Mike Griffin

Decatur, IL - Nowhere in organized labor is the failure and treachery of business unionism more indicting than in the United Auto Workers (UAW). Today, that treachery threatens not only the existence of the organization, but the fundamental values upon which the union was built. If there exists a saving grace for the UAW, it is not in the halls of Solidarity House [UAW headquarters in Detroit], but in the rank and file resurgence against the devastating concessions at Delphi and Visteon, parts suppliers to the auto industry. The massive job losses and concessions, including tiered wages and benefits, are not a new occurrence, but a carefully crafted course that involves not only the bastards of the boardroom, but top UAW leadership as well.



UAW members picket at Detroit auto show. Attacks on auto workers, if successful, will impact wages in many industries. Photo courtesy of Futureoftheunion.com