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The Fallout from the Clouds of Recession are Being Felt

Abstract

This article is part of the collection of writings of Mike (Marshall) Westfall, retired autoworker from General Motors in Flint, Michigan (1964-1994) and activist critic of the auto industry restructuring that led to devastating job losses. It originally appeared online in *The Westfall Papers*.

[<http://michaelwestfall.tripod.com/id79.html>, accessed 12/14/2011]

The Fallout From The Clouds Of Recession Are Being Felt



May,13,1986

By: Mike Westfall

American labor is now experiencing possibly the most difficult period in its history. Because of the concession aftermath and due to the frustrations of deep layoffs and plant closings, many domestic unions have already allowed real so called "cooperation" to take pace. Other unions are factoring out whether to "Lighten up" their economic contractual demands and agree to a new definition of labor relations or continue their historic adversarial role.

Profit Sharing- To see how much integrity General Motors has pertaining to cooperation, you only have to look at profit sharing

General Motors is a master of illusion and is working on the destruction of the present definition of a fair days work for a fair days pay. An internal document that surfaced in 1984 stated that G.M. would develop productivity improvements that would slice the North American Work force by tens of thousands of jobs and that G.M. intended to resist wage increases through profit sharing.

There is deep dissatisfaction among GM workers who, even in light of a strong GM sales period, received much smaller profit sharing checks for three years in a row than their counterparts at Ford. Using profit sharing in place of the historic "real wage increases" has allowed GM to adjust downward at will their labor cost.

GM has used profit sharing as a sly company gimmick giving in lieu of "real wage" and "real benefit" improvements, a program that would automatically be reduced and slice the auto workers standard of living on a sales downturn or corporate mistake, a program that would reduce any benefit that was tied directly to wages such as vacation pay, holiday pay, paid absence, ect.

GM has shown their ability of losing money and hiding money through manipulations and investments to buy expensive companies like E.D.S., Hughes, Saturn and countless others.

Westfall speaking to group at McCormick Convention Center in Chicago.

By cooperating with General Motors

on profit sharing, G.M. has made "chumps" out of us all by growing profoundly wealthier and still reducing the profit sharing to its workers.

Cooperation- Not long ago domestic unions encouraged militancy and there can be no question that this adversarial relationship solidified the membership giving autoworkers a degree of dignity and enabled negotiators to forge decent and respectable union contracts.

I believe that many good unionists are on both sides of the cooperative equation. I also believe that when it comes to labor relations, General Motors could not be trusted 50 years ago and they cannot be trusted today.

Workers are told "No more concessions" the rank and file believe "No more concessions," but cooperative General Motors continues its push for deeper and deeper concessions in the most insidious ways. By pitting worker against worker, through the drive to redefine the role of the union and through a complete and profound restructuring of every element of the worker's existence.

Because so much of the domestic competition we face results directly from GM's foreign sourcing deals, why should we continue to cooperate with GM on the productivity issues when every move they make is designed to slice our jobs and reduce our standard of living?

U.A.W. members have done everything in their power to make GM profitable and competitive. They have agreed to modernize and to technological change, and GM still slices thousands of workers, still continues to increase substantially the importation of engines, component parts and entire vehicles from Brazil, Mexico, Japan and elsewhere while treating our displaced workers callously. Obviously, the whole cooperative trend is out of control.

Issues that count like jobs, negotiated contractual matters, including work rules and classification reductions, are being set back 50 years in just a few short months.

General Motor's brand of cooperation is nothing less than a device to manipulate workers into lowering their defense so the corporation can deliver a knockout punch that will blast the historical definition of union into extinction.

It wasn't "hand holding" and "back slapping" but "militancy" and the "adversarial" relationship that garnered every benefit ever won for

workers and the corporation prospered.

The U.A.W. is all that domestic auto workers have and any significant positive changes that take place for labor will occur only by hard collective bargaining and there is nothing that further unlimited cooperation can do except weaken trade unions from within. In the end, why should we give back anything to GM?

We should not only be fighting to keep what we have, but we should be fighting to achieve more.

Our European competitors are moving towards shorter work times and why can't we? What is so wrong in working on retirement benefits that eliminate pension check shock with full C.O.L.A. or with new pensions that allows workers to retire earlier to save younger workers?

It is crazy to cooperate with GM who is racing to restructure away our jobs.

We are all heirs to our past U.A.W. members who faced bloody confrontations to create the strongest labor movement on earth, which would give us all a measure of prosperity and dignity.

It is up to us to think forward, not backward, and keep up the fight with our clearly identified opposition... General Motors.

Mike Westfall

