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U.A.W. 50th Anniversary Rally Westfall Presentation

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/id6.html>, accessed 12/14/2011]

U.A.W. 50th Rally Westfall Presentation

In 1987 the U.A.W. was 50 years old and for this important and historic event Mike Westfall sponsored a large Flint rally at Carman Ainsworth School auditorium in Flint.

Flint was where the U.A.W. began in 1937, Victor Reuther was a leader at that sit down strike and one of the founding fathers of the U.A.W.

Victor Reuther was Mike's friend and keynote speaker. Other speakers included Mike's friend popular television/radio personality Dave Barber, Don Douglas, president of Pontiacs Motor Divisions U.A.W. local 594, Jerry Tucker, candidate for President of the International U.A.W. and Tom Gilbertson, a leader in Westfall's awareness group.

Westfall conducted this rally and its significance is such that it will cover two papers . The first paper will include some excerpts from Westfall's introduction and presentation as well as a little insider information and behind the scenes background to the rally.

"WESTFALL PRE RALLY COMMENTS"

Good morning . In the lobby there are forms for those wishing to sign up for the rally in Washington , April 25. This Washington rally will be a mobilization for justice and peace in Central America and South Africa.

We will be supporting leaders like Cesar Chavez, President of the Farm Workers of America and others I have had contact with.

Friday I received a call from Ralph Nader's office in Washington. Every year some of his guys and some of my guys go down to the General Motors stockholders meetings and take on G.M.'s C.E.O. from the floor. We know how to literally tie up the microphones at these meetings.

This year it will be in May and we want to organize a huge turnout for a special demonstration so I have some of my folks with forms out in the lobby for all to sign who would like to go with us to this stockholders meeting of America's largest manufacturing business.

I want to make you aware that there have been calls to the school made prior to this rally by people wanting this rally to fail. They have claimed that we are a rowdy bunch that will destroy the property and create mayhem.

As I look out at you I see concerned American workers with their families . Some of you have been bused in from many states away and I thank you .Our detractors have failed.....AGAIN.

This rally is what America is all about and the information and issues transcends auto and reaches all jobs and all corners of our great country and we are going to tell it like it is today.

Now, this is a public school building so do not litter it up and we should all be aware that there is no smoking allowed in this building. Please , let us leave it as clean as we found it.

I realize how large this crowd is so I am asking you to limit your walking around so others won't be distracted. We have a lot of media and cameras here.

Keep printed material limited to the lobby. I don't want it handed out in here.

We have some very important speakers here and to get it started I would like us to all stand as Jo Ann Varga sings the National Anthem.....

Thank you Joann. Now I would like us all to stand as Dale Bonasse from our committee leads us in prayer.

Thank you Dale.....

"WESTFALL PRESENTATION"

This is a very large rally today and it reflects the spirit , concern and interest of America's workers.

While the issues we will be raising are targeted at auto workers they really are serious issues for all of our American workers from one end of our great country to the other. We are all together.

In September 1961 Walter Reuther said "I will be dissatisfied until we can promise workers tenure of employment so that they

are not dumped on to the street."

What would Walter Reuther think if he could see what was happening today !

We know what the difficulties of layoff are..No one knows better then us.

We see our plants closing. We see the devastation in our families faces.

For many here today because of their employment situation this city has gone to ruin and their world has gone to ruin.

For those that follow it may not get better it may get significantly worse.

General Motors is holding each of our plants up for ransom and giving work only to those who agree to undercut the others.

This is called whipsawing. General Motors is pitting plant against plant, worker against worker, nation against nation and union local against union local in an effort to reduce the entire labor force to the lowest common denominator.

THIS HAS GOT TO STOP !...applause.....

Working cheaper has never created one job it has only shifted jobs.

If we gave back every benefit ever negotiated and up to 90% of our wages we may starve in Flint and we may starve in Detroit...Applause.....

But we would still not be competitive with General Motors exploited foreign workers.

General Motors has been giving the impression that we have been moving forward by helping them become more productive but in reality brothers and sisters we have been going BACKWARDS.. APPLAUSE.....

In Roger Smiths executive sweet they have been putting out the illusion that we have been going forwards but brothers and sisters we have BEEN GOING BACKWARDS AND I HAVE THE EAR OF ROGER SMITH.....Applause.....

It is time to challenge the system that enriches the wealthy and disregards the majority of workers as if we were useless and unimportant.

IT IS TIME TO TORPEDO THE CRUISE ON THE G.M. LOVEBOAT.....extended applause/ovation.....

Under the Brothers Reuther, and I know you all are aware of who is sitting up here next to me today [Victor Reuther]Applause.....

Under the leadership of the Brothers Reuther workers standard of living was increased more then at any other time.

The word concession was not in the Reuther vocabulary.

Instead of profit sharing, workers received decent wage increases and the Brothers Reuther never lived in submission.

In addition to what General motors is attempting to do contractually to workers General Motors has also shown a typical lack of social responsibility on other levels of operation.

Instead of paying their fair share in our communities G.M. has demanded property tax assessment reductions.

This is incredible because General Motors is at the same time modernizing their factories to state of the art making them not less but profoundly more valuable and more profitable. On top of disrupting municipal services G.M. tax demands have pulled money out of our educational systems in our communities in which communities operates forcing many local educational systems both college and k-12 to slice deeply into already inadequate budgets to put up operating funds to fight G.M. .

Friend's that's not cooperation. It is maximizing profits at the expense of our children.

So as they eliminate the workers jobs through deliberate restructuring at the same time they increase the community taxes on the dwindling taxpayer base to increase their profits. I am one of the leaders in this tax assessment fight and we have done a lot of work on it.

Back to the factory floor. General Motors has proclaimed they are going to change worker culture profoundly. What do they mean?

General Motors definition of new culture is much deeper then most workers are aware .

General Motors has been working on ways to enhance G.M.'s efficiency by working on highly refined , socially motivated cooperative management concepts.

GM fully intends to develop a system of in house peer pressure, slice the workers jobs, speed up the work pace, eliminate the workers classifications which took years to negotiate and cut the workers protective work rules .

Roger smith is right. This does smack of a culture very foreign to the American way.

In Japan the Japanese workers do many of the tasks that would be unacceptable by organized labor in our country. These tasks include monitoring fellow workers attitudes, improving worker output, punishing and ferreting out dissidents that will not conform and squashing opposition.....ouch ! Three times G.M. has tried to oust me. The last time was when they claimed I led a group of fellow wildcat strikers at their Flint truck plant and shut down the line for almost half an hour because they wouldn't turn on the heat in mid winter. They turned the heat on and kept it on after they discharged me.

So I don't personally like the idea of company unions.

Brothers and sisters we are long overdue for a G.M.-U.A.W. showdown.

If G.M. won't stop shipping our jobs offshore to their exploited foreign workers, if G.M. won't stop blackmailing our UAW , if G.M. won't stop closing our plants and throwing our people out of work then

WHY SHOULD WE NOT SHUT THEIR DOORS WITH A NATIONAL STRIKEAPPLAUSE.....

A STRIKE THAT CLOSES GM DOWN TOTALLY AND PUTS THEM IN THE SAME POSITION THEY HAVE HAD US FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS ON THEIR KNEES.....APPLAUSE/OVATION.....

Our sit downers did it and we can do it to and we should before it is to late. My friends this is the only level G.M. relates to.

Experience over the last few years clearly demonstrate that while autoworkers have given deep concessions that G.M. has laughed all the way to the bank. While making huge profits and paying huge bonuses to their already overpaid executives G.M. at the same time has slotted for export the very jobs of our domestic auto workers who sacrificed...applause,.....

One of the auto workers major concessions was the loss of the annual improvement factor which was traded for profit sharing.

The A.I.F. guaranteed each worker a 3% wage increase every year.

G.M. is out to change the present definition of a fair days work for a fair days pay.

G.M. has used profit sharing as a sly company gimmick in lieu of real wage and in lieu of real benefit improvements.

A program that would automatically be reduced and slice the autoworkers standard of living on a sales downturn or corporate mistake.

A program that would reduce any benefit that was tied directly to wages like vacation pay, holiday pay and all the rest.

G.M. has shown their ability of hiding profits through manipulation and investments to buy expensive companies like E.D.S. ,Hughs and automatix out of Mass. which is a high tech vision company and many other robotic companies they have bought into.

In fact by us buying into profit sharing G.M. has made chumps of us all. applause.....

So fellow auto workers we don't need concessions in1987 we need gains...Applause...

G.M. is the master of illusion and in reality you have improved your efficiency., improved the quality of G.M.'s products . You have cooperated with G.M. like never before. You have been a hardworking, dedicated, highly skilled workforce and you have already made significant personal sacrifices repaid with to much criticism and to little appreciation from G.M.Applause.....

I have purposely organized this rally in Flint on the 50th anniversary of our U.A.W. so that we might revive that old U.A.W. spirit which we will need so badly in the struggle ahead.

It was 50 years ago when it was unexpected that just a handful of autoworkers in this very city would take G.M. on and create a powerful worker force called the U.A.W. , a force each one of us here today is a member of. It is only fitting that we bring in Victor Reuther out of retirement from Washington as a symbol of our solidarity.

You will not hear about the difficulties I have had and the pressures I have endured to make my friend victor the keynote speaker but I will simply say I would have never done this rally and there would not have been a worker auto rally in Flint commemorating the U.A.W. for these last 50 years if Victor had not been here.

Mike Westfall

"Rally Background"

There is a lot of background history on this particular rally and I will cover just a brief "insiders" snapshot....

The U.A.W. International leadership had at this particular time because of Victor Ruther's criticism of soft U.A.W. positions disassociated itself with Victor Reuther.

Westfall was an elected U.A.W. delegate and would actively attend all of the Constitutional Conventions and Bargaining Conventions.

At these conventions the International U.A.W. would not issue Vic Reuther credentials to these critical events so he was in effect refused entry to the organization he helped create. It was pure and simple "cheap" politics!

The only way that Victor Reuther could get into these huge conventions was to sneak in as a news reporter which he did .

Westfall would meet , talk and sit with victor Reuther at side meetings at hotels and elsewhere.

Owen Bieber was President of the U.A.W. at the time of this rally and one of Westfalls speakers was Jerry Tucker who was running against Bieber for President.

When the International U.A.W. learned of Westfall's anniversary rally in Flint using Reuther as keynote speaker and bringing in Jerry Tucker as a speaker the International Union called Westfall over to Region 1-C headquarters in Flint and Region 1-C. Director Ruben Burks strongly suggested that Westfall use U.A.W. Vice President Steve Yokich as keynote because Reuther would be an embarrassment to the Flint leadership because of his militant stand.

Steve Yokich went on to become President of the U.A.W. and Burks went on to become financial secretary of the International U.A.W., the arguably number 2 spot in the entire union .

Westfall respected Yokich and had written material for Yokich in Solidarities "Skill magazine". Burks happened to get his start at the same truck plant Westfall was from and had been a member of the union caucus that Westfall was chairman of .

Westfall told Burks that Reuther was a sit down leader and a founding father of the union and it was fitting that he be invited and that he was the only "honest" keynote for this particular historic event .

Burks told Westfall that if he cooperated with region 1-c that the rally would be sanctioned by the International U.A.W. and be a guaranteed success. If not it would be an utter failure without their help.

Westfall told Burks that the most important man he had to look at was himself in the mirror and the rally was his and Reuther was going to be the keynote and Tucker was going to be a speaker. Burks told Westfall to hit the door.

Westfall left Burks office in anger but Reuther was locked in as keynote.

Immediately Carman Ainsworth began getting calls that Westfall was bringing in socialistic out of state trouble makers .

The superintendent of schools became rightfully upset and called Westfall and wanted to know what was going on.

Westfall assured the superintendent that the event would be policed and there would be no trouble and that while it was going to be a huge rally with folks bused in from all over the country that it would be held with dignity and well supervised... and it was.

To those who don't know, there is a socialistic fringe or element that follows unions. However we were not communists and Westfall had 10 men as large as him at 6ft.3in. & 230lbs. with black arm bands escorting any person handing out socialist propaganda off the school property.

Also to Westfalls advantage ,the superintendent of schools was aware of Westfall's work towards helping schools and had seen Westfall multiple times on Flint TV as a leader in the G.M. property tax assessment reduction fight . Because of Westfalls reputation, the school opened their facilities to him and the rally was a tremendous success and went exactly as Westfall said.

Those attempting to make the rally a failure failed because Westfall, his devoted group and the many dedicated people helping would never give up and were destined to pull off this historic event.

The huge school auditorium was filled to capacity, there was literally only tight standing room, the lobby was full and loud speakers were even installed outside the building.

<http://michaelwestfall.tripod.com/>
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