

S.O.S. BULLETIN

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75 years of UAW – and Where Are We?

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UAW in May, 1935. In December, 1936, UAW members seized GM's Flint plants in a sit-down strike and held on for 44 days to force GM to recognize their union. The victory set off a wave of organizing across the Midwest. For decades to come, union workers held power on shop floors across America. They used their power over production to wrest a better living from the corporations that used their labor.

In 1950, UAW membership rose above 1 million. Through ups and downs, we reached a peak of 1.5 million members, in 1979. But since 1979 the membership has fallen through the floor and we are now only 355,000. Over one million jobs, gone. Over two-thirds of our membership, gone.

Wages and benefits are slashed to the point that new hires will make less than half the current scale. There's a deep two tier division in the plants. Good jobs have been outsourced or combined. One worker is loaded down with the work of two or three. Seniority means almost nothing in the new scheme of things.

What kind of leadership presides over the loss of one million members? What kind of policies weaken us to this point? Why have we been set back 50 years?

Our leadership's concessions policy has grown too close to the corporate outlook. Gradually over the years, the leadership made changes in election timing and floor representation that lessened the membership's control. But in 1980 the dam burst. Against the wishes of the rank and file, President Fraser pushed through permanent concessions to Chrysler. Thus began the era of "we have to save the companies." There is only one logical end to this idea: we have to become the cheapest labor possible. Because the companies will ALWAYS find a way to be in trouble!

President Gettelfinger recently made a speech defending all the concessions so far. He used the phrase, "to save our industry."

Where in the UAW Constitution does it say that our first obligation is to the industry? We have a union in order to save ourselves from the problems that industry and its owners create!

It's not in our power to save the industry. Labor costs are less than 9 per cent of the selling price of a vehicle. Nothing we can do will bail them out. That's the government's job and we have seen how many billions the government will provide for them! *"Federal officials say General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group LLC face no major hurdles in winning billions of dollars in low-cost government loans to retool factories."* – *Detroit News*.

The very notion of "saving" the industry is nonsense. Even at last year's worst, 10 million cars and trucks sold in this country. Over eleven million will be sold this year if the banks don't crash again. Somebody will sell those units, and somebody will make every piece that goes into those units, and that somebody ought to be all UAW, all first tier. But we have to fight for it! We can't concession our way to equal pay and a union that commands respect!

We have to fight for those jobs just as the sit-downers fought for their union. Here is where the International leaders retreat. Our leadership since 1980 has been dedicated to "non-adversarial" unionism. In other words we won't fight. We will cooperate with the company agenda. And that is why UAW membership and conditions have decayed to the point we are at today. "Saving the industry" means cooperating with its goals. It means profits before people. That's why our union has lost its way. That's why you never see an International rep unless they are in your face saying "Vote Yes for concessions, or you will lose your job."

We see that after all the "Yes" votes, the jobs are gone anyway. The pro-company, co-operation, non-adversarial policy is a complete 30-year disaster and must be revoked. The Constitutional Convention will be June 14-17 at Cobo Hall in Detroit. S.O.S. urges every member to come on down and talk turkey to your delegates.

Uphold Article 2, Section 1!

UAW Constitution, Article 2, Section 1: "To improve working conditions, create a uniform system of shorter hours, higher wages, health care and pensions; to maintain and protect the interests of workers under the jurisdiction of this International Union."

Thirty years of the leadership's concessions policy fails on all counts.

Uphold Article 19, Sections 1 and 3!

Section 1: "...No officer, member, representative or agent of the International Union ... shall have the power or authority to counsel, cause, initiate, participate in or ratify any action which constitutes a breach of any contract entered into by a Local Union or by the International Union or a subordinate body thereof."

Section 3: "No Local Union Officer, International Officer or International Representative shall have the authority to negotiate the terms of a contract or any supplement thereof with any employer without first obtaining the approval of the Local Union." Yet our contracts are repeatedly reopened and renegotiated without the approval of the affected members.

In 2004, the International negotiated a two-tier supplement with Delphi that was presumed ratified because the International was given permission to negotiate. The membership was never allowed to vote on the two tier supplement. The two tier supplement was imposed without a vote.

Even retirees, whom the UAW does not formally represent since retirees do not work, do not pay dues, and are not permitted to vote on contracts, have seen their contractual benefits renegotiated – for the worse.

No more negotiations without authorization!

No more supplements without ratification! No more secret "shelf" agreements!

Uphold Article 19, Section 6!

Article 19, Section 6: "The International Executive Board shall protect all Local Unions who have succeeded in establishing higher wages and favorable conditions and have superior agreements, so that no infringement by Local Unions with inferior agreements in workplaces doing similar work may be committed against the Local Union with advanced agreements."

No more whipsawing of one Local against another for the lowest bid! Recently the Local Unions at former Delphi plants, which GM bought back, were instructed to break their master agreement and renegotiate substandard contracts. They call this destruction of solidarity "Competitive Operating Agreements." Otherwise known as the lemming agreements: one after the other, off the cliff!

Know Exactly What We Are Voting On!

For years the Administration has said that distributing an entire tentative agreement to the affected membership would be too costly and time consuming. SOS has proved them wrong. The internet makes it simple, easy, and inexpensive to make the full contract available to all the members.

Members prefer to make a decision based on full knowledge! We need to amend the Constitution to stipulate: A) that the full proposed agreement be made available on the internet; and B) that members have unrestricted access to the whole contract and ten days to study, discuss, and evaluate its merits before a vote is taken.

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**More on-line resources: warriorsoflabor.com, uawtalk.com,
blueovalforums.com/forums/fordemployeeforum.**

This bulletin is put out in the interests of informing workers and renewing the fighting power of organized labor.

Please send your comments and your on-the-job, on-scene reports to:
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Solidarity!
S.O.S.