

GM says US auto union gave blanket no-strike pledge

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General Motors management is telling Wall Street investors that the agreement to end the two Flint strikes included a pledge that the United Auto Workers would call no local strikes before a new national contract is signed next year. GM had demanded such a guarantee as a condition for settling the strikes.

The UAW ended the strikes by acceding to the company's demands to abolish long-standing work rules, increase productivity and destroy hundreds of jobs through outsourcing and the closing and selling of plants, not only in Flint, but throughout GM's North American operations.

According to the Associated Press, GM advised institutional investors Wednesday that it had a handshake agreement with the UAW to last at least until the current three-year national contract is replaced. 'Unless something goes seriously awry, they'll have labor peace for the next 18 months until the next national contract is signed, sealed and delivered,' said analyst Nick Colas of Credit Suisse First Boston.

At the time of the agreement UAW officials said they had only agreed to ban strikes at the Delphi Flint East plant and two Dayton, Ohio brake plants, in return for a company pledge that it would not shutter or sell the plants for the next 16 months.

While denying the existence of a general no-strike pledge, UAW Vice President Richard Shoemaker said, 'It is our hope there will not be [future strikes].' As part of the agreement a new, high-level body, likely to include UAW President Stephen Yokich and GM CEO John F. Smith, is being set up to prevent further local strikes.

Over the last two months workers have voted for strike authorization at plants in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Wisconsin and Tennessee. The agreement to end the Flint strikes included settlements at a number of

these locals, such as the Dayton plants where a strike crippled GM's operations in 1996. Pending strike notices still exist at the Saturn plant in Tennessee, the Janesville, Wisconsin plant which produces GM's highly-profitable sports-utility vehicles, and the Bowling Green, Kentucky plant, where workers have been without a contract for 21 months.

The UAW has promised labor peace just as the company is about to embark on a major restructuring and downsizing program. On Monday, GM's top executives and directors will meet to discuss a plan for the shutdown of assembly plants, the sell-off of the Delphi parts division and the elimination of between 38,000 and 50,000 hourly jobs in North America over the next few years.

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