

UAW makes proposal in American Axle negotiations

Our reporters
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Negotiators for the United Auto Workers have reportedly submitted a proposal to American Axle & Manufacturing (AAM) on pay and benefits, in a sign that the union is moving quickly to shut down the nearly seven-week-long strike and impose the bulk of the company's wage-cutting demands.

The proposal came on Wednesday, the first day of formal negotiations between the union and the company since March 10, and follows a private between UAW President Ron Gettelfinger and American Axle CEO Richard Dauch. The union kept the details of their proposal secret from the 3,650 striking workers in Michigan and New York, saying they were awaiting a response by the company.

The UAW bureaucracy, however, has made clear that it is prepared to offer major concessions. In a column published last week, UAW President Ron Gettelfinger said the union had already made proposals that "will mean real sacrifices by our members and real savings for the company."

Wall Street investors bought up American Axle stock on Thursday in response to the news, anticipating that the strike is near an end and the company would get most of what it is asking for. American Axle shares rose by 5.3 percent in morning trading, to \$22.08. GM shares also got a boost, rising by 3.1 percent, to \$20.75.

The WSWs spoke to striking American Axle workers on the picket line in Detroit as the negotiations continued on Thursday. Jim, a toolmaker, has been at the plant since 1995. He said, "[AAM CEO Richard] Dauch made \$10 million last year. Our wages are just a small fraction of that. It's all about money and more money; that's what they want.

"The US is going to be a third world country, soon, as far as wages go. We may have to take some concessions. But why doesn't he take some? Why

doesn't he say, 'Instead of \$10 million, I'll take \$2 million'? But he won't do that.

"Look at Delphi. They took a big cut there, and lo and behold, a lot of investors invested in the company.

"What affects us will affect every tier I and tier II supplier. If we have to take a big hit it will hurt everyone. It will be: 'Now, we're going to give you \$8 instead of \$10.'

"Everybody is always down on the union members, saying we drive prices up. But our wages are just a small portion of the price of a car. If we take concessions, how come the prices don't go down?

"The corporations just want more money. We have kids starving in this country."

Hammer, with 12 years at the company, said, "They want to drop us down to \$10.50 an hour. I'm currently at \$30, and I couldn't even make it if was cut by half. They want to cut everybody's wages.

"I caught a newscast the other day and they were showing how the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The poor were down 9 percent, but the rich were up by 70 percent."

Brian has worked for AAM for 12 years. "Our [union] president is not working for us, he's for management," he said. "For Dauch, it's all about him. AAM should stand for 'American Axle Monarchy,' not American Axle & Manufacturing. He's like another Bush or Saddam Hussein—a dictator.

"I worked in the forge for 12 years before coming over to this part. It was horrible. There were rats in there as big as cats. Sometimes in the summer it would get to 150 degrees in there, and if it was humid outside, it would be ten times that in there.

"I was 27 when I started working there. I've seen a few deaths. It was the worst conditions I've ever worked in. But at the time it was good pay—\$20 an

hour.

“But now that they’ve got most of the GM vets out of here—I’d say they’re only about 1 percent—they want to push us down further. There’s going to be a lot of animosity back in the plant. The company’s going to expect you to be on the job five minutes early.

“We took concessions four years ago. We only stayed out a day and a half that time, but we should have stayed out longer.”



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