

Who's who on the UAW negotiating team?

Gabriel Black
23 July 2015

Negotiations between the United Auto Workers union and the Big Three automakers in Detroit have begun. The current four-year labor agreements for 140,000 General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) workers expire on September 14.

The top bargainers selected by UAW President Dennis Williams consist of a rogues' gallery of pro-company stooges who made their way up the UAW ladder by selling out strikes, imposing management-dictated contracts and propping up the big business politicians in the Democratic Party.

Below is a brief profile of the top four UAW bargainers.

Dennis Williams

UAW President

Total known income: \$324,556

UAW salary and disbursements 2014: \$175,160; Navistar finance and audit committee: \$120,000; UAW Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Trust (VEBA): \$29,396

Williams was installed as president of the UAW in June 2014 after overseeing the union's nearly billion dollars in assets as secretary treasurer. In 2004 and 2011 Williams negotiated concessionary contracts with heavy equipment manufacturer Caterpillar that ended company-paid pension plans, increased health care costs, sanctioned plant closings and reduced pay for new hires to "market-based" wage rates. The 2004 deal set the standard for the later imposition of the two-tier wage system in the auto industry.

A March 21 article in the industry publication *Automotive News*, entitled "Navistar deal shows UAW president's pragmatism," praised Williams for being "well aware of the pressures that companies face from global competitors." It noted that Williams had just agreed to a four-year deal that granted "lean-manufacturing rule changes to aid Navistar's turnaround." Williams is a paid member of the truck

maker's corporate board.

James Settles

Vice President, UAW-Ford Department

Total known income: \$222,181

UAW Salary: \$163,785; UAW Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Trust (VEBA): \$29,396; Board of directors, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan: at least \$29,000; UAW-Ford National Programs: unknown.

Settles oversaw the betrayal of the three-month American Axle strike in 2008, which cut workers' wages from \$28 an hour to \$18.50 for some workers and as low as \$10 an hour for others. The company also laid off more than half of its 3,600 workers and shut down its Detroit, Michigan and Tonawanda, New York plants. The sellout set the stage for the UAW's collaboration in the Obama administration's restructuring of GM and Chrysler the next year, which expanded two-tier wages, abolished the eight-hour day and relieved the companies of retiree health care costs.

In 2011, Settles helped ram through a four-year labor contract against 41,000 Ford workers. After workers at assembly plants in suburban Detroit and Chicago rejected the contract, Settles belittled these dissenting workers, stating, "The Ford workers voting early on in the process were voting on emotion."

In 2012, Settles worked with Ford to spin off production of instrumental panels to Detroit Manufacturing Systems, a sweatshop jointly owned by Andra Rush and French auto parts manufacturer Faurecia. The workers at the factory, which was set up with federal funding from the Obama administration, only earn \$11 an hour while still paying dues to Settles' former UAW Local 600.

Norwood Jewell

Vice President, UAW-Fiat Chrysler Department

Total known income: \$186,420

UAW salary and disbursements 2014: \$157,024; UAW Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Trust

(VEBA): \$29,396; UAW-Chrysler National Training Center: unknown.

Jewell played a key role in the defeat of the two-month 1998 General Motors strike in Flint, Michigan. The UAW signed an agreement that accepted the company's major demands and set up a new labor-management structure to enforce a 15 percent productivity increase and the elimination of 500 jobs. The sellout strike paved the way for GM to spinoff its Delphi parts division in 1999. The new company would close 24 US plants, wipe out 11,500 jobs worldwide and declare bankruptcy in 2005. The concessions the UAW handed over to Delphi would set the stage for the 2007 "transformational" contract with the Big Three automakers that established the two-tier wage system and the multi-billion dollar VEBA trust fund for the UAW.

Jewell is in charge of negotiations for the UAW's National Aerospace Department. During the special bargaining convention earlier this year Jewell spurted out his support for Obama's militarist policies, saying he was pleased about US crushing economic sanctions on Russia. "Economic sanctions against Russia have provided an opportunity to the US rocket engine manufacturers. A movement to 'Buy American' rocket engines has gained momentum." American sanctions against Russia have hurt millions of workers in Russia, pushing them deeper into poverty, and have brought the US and Russia closer to nuclear war.

Cindy Estrada

Vice President, UAW-GM Department

Total known income: \$197,058

UAW Salary: \$167,662; UAW Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Trust (VEBA): \$29,396; UAW-GM Human Resource Center: unknown.

In March of this year, General Motors announced it would carry out a \$5 billion stock buyback and issue another \$5 billion in dividend payments, evoking enthusiastic responses from the company's wealthy investors. Estrada, who is leading negotiations with GM, praised the deal, saying, "The strategic process outlined today leaves room for our members to prosper, strong product investment for customers, and a healthy, well-positioned company." These profits, made off the backs of workers, will also find their way into the UAW's bank accounts since it remains GM's largest shareholder.

When she is not praising the financial dealings of GM, she cynically complains about the impoverishment of workers. At last March's bargaining convention, Estrada declared, "When you make \$8 and \$9 per hour in auto manufacturing, that is a poverty wage and that has to stop."

In fact, the UAW is fully responsible for these poverty wages. In the 1980s, the UAW betrayed one strike after another in the independent parts sector in order to lower costs of supplies for the Detroit automakers. In 1980, an auto parts worker earned 15 percent lower wages than a worker at a Big Three assembly plant. By 2000, the differential had risen to 31 percent. Today, real wages for auto parts workers, who now account for three of every four autoworker jobs, fell three times faster than for manufacturing as a whole. Nearly one out of six parts workers are now employed by a temporary agency.

Last year, Estrada oversaw the sellout of workers at the Lear seating factory in Hammond, Indiana. After shutting down a one-day strike, the UAW claimed it had abolished the two-tier wage system at the plant. In reality, the deal created a third tier of so-called sub-assembly workers earning even lower wages. The UAW has already signaled that it is willing to do the same thing for GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact