

Labor by Leif Johnson

UAW goes back 50 years

The new Saturn agreement has less to do with building a car than with destroying the fruits of industrial unionism.

Never in post-World War II America has organized labor been dealt such a blow. In return for a 1990 promise of 6,000 jobs in the remote hamlet of Spring Hill, Tennessee, the UAW made a "handshake agreement" that has been described, accurately, as a "revolutionary document." The agreement stipulates the following:

- All shop committees are abolished;
- All grievance procedures are abolished;
- All work rules are abolished, or rather established by GM;
- All job titles are abolished, except for three skilled classifications.
- Pay will be 80% of the average auto wage in the United States;
- UAW pensions will be replaced by an individual account for each employee, whose pension ends when his "fund" runs out.
- An "incentive pay"/"profit-sharing" plan will be contingent on "work performance" and "cooperation" with GM.
- Permanent employment is guaranteed—unless the plant suffers economic reverses, undergoes some "catastrophe," or—the longest of long shots—"the national economy sinks down."

Whatever made the UAW, a union over 1 million strong, "handshake" an agreement that is nothing less than the destruction of the union and all that it has fought for in its 50-year history?

Now comes the real shocker: The UAW claims that it was the author of the "Saturn agreement"!

At the press conference held July 30, announcing the location of the Saturn plant, attended by GM top

brass, Tennessee state officials, and UAW leadership, GM Saturn president, William Hoaglund, announced proudly:

"Throughout the development of Saturn, one man had a vision for developing new union-management relationships. And that man is going to talk to us right now and his name's Don Ephlin." Don Ephlin, UAW vice-president, popped up and grandly announced:

"It's been a very great opportunity for myself, the members of our staff who have worked on Saturn, because this is the greatest opportunity we in the union and blue-collar workers in General Motors have had to play such a positive role in the development of something that is so important for all of us. We've achieved many of our long-sought goals in the agreement. . . .

This is the closest the union and the corporation have ever come to having a truly living document."

Ephlin credited former UAW General Motors division vice-president Irving Bluestone and former UAW chieftain Doug Fraser as the authors of the agreement.

The UAW has taken 10% out of the strike fund to publicize the Saturn "living document" on local and national TV ads, while the leadership, particularly UAW president Owen Bieber, has used the union's 50th-anniversary celebrations to stump for the "handshake."

Of course, the Saturn plant will not be built for five years—if ever. The real thrust of the labor "living document" is to have it imposed upon the nation's auto and other industrial

workers now.

Last January, GM president Roger Smith announced to reporters, "Saturn will give us an entrée to go back and Saturnize the rest of the company. That to me is 90% of the goal. Saturn, the car, is 10%."

Taking his cue, Chrysler chairman Lido Iacocca, announced at the opening of bargaining talks in August, that he would accept nothing less than a Saturn agreement at Chrysler.

Iacocca exclaimed: "We are the first national contract to come up. These [the GM Saturn agreement] have been individual plans or projects in the future. This is for real this fall."

This is a major problem for the UAW. Chrysler workers, who have seen 100,000 of their fellow workers axed by Iacocca's "reorganization" and were forced to give back \$1.5 billion in wages, benefits, days off, and vacation time, want wages restored to Ford and GM levels—especially with Chrysler posting record profits. Having been very nearly "Saturnized" for the last six years, they appear in no mood to accept the far worse alternative so beloved by the UAW.

One strategy by the UAW leadership to enforce "Saturnization" in the Chrysler pact is open thuggery. On Sept. 8, Detroit city-council candidate Hank Wilson, a former president of UAW local 600's Dearborn assembly division, was gooned by 15 UAW thugs at the entrance to his own General Council union meeting. Wilson, who has had surgery for intestinal cancer, was repeatedly punched and kicked in the stomach and hospitalized. He had campaigned to expose Saturn and open idled auto plants to build 1,000 MX missiles and 1,000,000 tractors a year, re-employing the 150,000 permanently unemployed auto and steel workers in Detroit to defend the nation and feed the world.