

General Motors Throws Down Gauntlet; Workers Answer With Sit-Downs

By "Conveyor"

DETROIT—Without a dissenting vote, the conference of UAW representatives in General Motors plants rejected the new agreement proffered them by the manufacturers. There was no other possible course. Acceptance or any manner of conciliation with this agreement would have spelled the beginning of the end of the United Automobile Workers of America.

After six months of negotiations, Messrs. Knudsen and Sloan had the effrontery to offer the union an agreement which vitiates everything gained in the great strikes of last year. Not a word is mentioned about increased cost of living. No reference is made to shorter hours to absorb the growing army of unemployed in the auto industry. No provisions are made to establish corporation-wide seniority to counter-act the tendency of decentralization of General Motors plants. No improvements are made in the faulty shop steward system now current. In other words, not a single one of the demands presented to the corporation by the conference of G. M. workers last June are even as much as recognized—let alone granted.

Company Agreement Unacceptable

Were the UAW even to consider accepting the agreement as a starting point for bargaining, it would have the struggle of its life to jack it up to the miserable agreement of last February. The new contract begins by incorporating the provisions of the infamous letter agreed to last September by the corporation and by the GEB of the union and the bargaining committee. This letter gave the company the right to discipline all workers engaged in so-called "unauthorized" strikes—sit-downs, slowdowns, stoppages, etc. To this is added a rider. After the union militant is fired by the company, he is to be expelled by the union! Failure to comply with this provision is deemed sufficient reason for immediate abrogation of the agreement. No dues are to be collected or members solicited on company premises. The corporation determines who shall be members of the unions, specifically excluding salaried employees and other categories from the scope of the agreement. Employees are to be permitted to settle their grievances individually with foremen or even directly with the management. If space permitted, we could go on indefinitely enumerating the outrageous features of the contract. But before we leave it, we will call the reader's attention to the section which states:

"The union agrees during the existence of this agreement no strike will be called without the authority of the International Union".

At the Milwaukee convention of the UAW, George Addes and other leading members of the United Group combined with the Martin clique to put this clause in the constitution over the opposition of a group of militant members led by Bert Cochran of Cleveland. Why did General Motors insert this clause into its agreement when it was already in the UAW Constitution? Obviously because the union bureaucracy is too feeble to enforce this odious provision. In this case General Motors becomes the policemen of the UAW constitution. What more proof is needed to show that in the final analysis it is economic pressure from the

bosses alone that will enforce bureaucratic constitutions and keep bureaucrats in power?

Leaders Try to Shift Responsibility

Little description is required to portray the reaction of the delegates to the agreement. Indeed so strong was the opposition that elaborate parliamentary maneuvering was necessary before the chairman of the bargaining committee, William E. Dowell, could get the floor to report. Dowell shifted responsibility for the agreement onto the rank and file, accusing it of not bringing pressure to bear on General Motors.

But he forgot to state that the GEB condemned the only type of effective pressure: strike. Had not the bargaining committee and the GEB, as far back as September 15th, voluntarily granted the very rights to discipline militants which they now inserted into the agreement? Didn't G. M. proceed to enforce this newly granted privilege by penalizing a worker in at least one plant in Detroit? And didn't Martin refuse to sanction strikes in the Turnstedt plants in Detroit and in Yellow Truck in Pontiac despite overwhelmingly favorable votes? How could the membership possibly have applied pressure on the company in face of such an attitude from their own leadership?

On the other hand, local union meetings were deluged with optimistic reports of "progress" made in negotiations. On the very day the General Motors Conference opened, the United Automobile Worker, official organ of the UAW, appeared with the statement that negotiations between the union and the corporation had "reached a point where a tentative agreement on the main points in the amendment of their contract had been reached."

It is hardly possible that Martin and Co. expected to cram the above-mentioned agreement down the throats of the delegates. The truth of the matter is that Martin himself was astonished at the agreement. The entire tenor of his remarks to the conference was that of the maiden who had been misled and betrayed. An examination of the policy of the Ex. Bd. will show that they banked on their newly-acquired "respectability" as a means of wangling some concessions from the corporation. And the inevitable complement of a policy of currying favor with the bosses is lying to the workers to keep them from strike action.

Move to Dismiss Committee

The reception given the report of the committee's stewardship was inevitable and deserved. A motion by John W. Anderson, militant representative from Fleetwood, to dismiss the bargaining committee, met with thunderous applause. A rebuke of this kind would have re-established the power of the rank and

file after a period of bureaucratic suppression. It would have oriented the workers to vigorous strike action. At this point however, Walter Reuther came to the rescue of the despairing Martin forces and their Lovestoneite stooges. Reuther's prestige as erstwhile leader of the opposition forces saved the Administration from a crushing defeat. Nevertheless at least 20 per cent of the delegates voted to dismiss the committee. For the first time, a goodly section of the militants was to see that Reuther's opposition was shammed in order to cover up the dirty work of the Martin crowd. This lesson will stick.

From this point on, the conference dragged. A compromise was reached on seating a section of the Flint delegation which had been unseated by manipulations of the Martin machine. A lengthy disjointed discussion on decentralization ensued to sidetrack action on the burning questions before the conference. A proposal to organize a one or two hour sit-down nationally as a protest against GM's decentralization plans was introduced as the only contribution of the Unity Group to the conference. Whatever value this may have as a demonstration is vitiated by its obvious purpose to quiet the dissatisfied delegates.

After a long, windy, blustering speech from Homer Martin, in which he indicated that he was ready to make peace with the C.P.-S.P. Unity Group, a stooge made a motion to adjourn. Once again Anderson threw a monkey wrench into the calculations of the machine by a motion to continue the conference for a third day and settle down to cases. And once again Walter Reuther saved Martin and Co., in their dilemma, by using his personal influence to carry a motion to give Martin and the GEB the power to call another conference within 60 days.

Conference Results in Sit-Down Wage

The adjournment of the General Motors Conference without the adoption of any concrete proposals is far from a victory for the Martin bureaucracy. True, the fact that the auto workers must fend for themselves in face of the most difficult situation since the strike, will create considerable hardship. But the repudiation of the corporation's contract takes a millstone off their necks. With the letter to General Motors consigned to its proper place—the wastebasket the auto workers are now free to repel the company's attack in preparation for the time when they can make a concerted nationwide counter-attack.

The change in the situation was immediately apparent. No sooner had the conference ended than a renewed outbreak of sit-downs made the front pages of the local press. At the time of this writing, over 17,000 workers are involved in a strike in Pontiac. In the last few days, some 3,000 workers were affected

Koci, West Coast Militant, Menaced by Deportation

SAN FRANCISCO—Support of a wide campaign to stop the deportation of Frank Koci, well known west coast waterfront militant, is being urged here by the Northern California Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. The union is calling upon labor organizations everywhere to adopt resolutions protesting the threatened deportation and to send copies of the resolutions to the Labor Department at Washington.

Koci is the victim of a frame-up attempt to rid the West Coast of militant, foreign-born unionists. He is a member of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union. He was arrested May 14, 1936 on a complaint filed by Carmen Joan Dodson, who besides acting as a stool pigeon for the labor department has the distinction of having been a pupil of Isadora Duncan. She is the former wife of Kid McCoy, and now teaches (the sign says so) "revolutionary" dancing.

And Carmen Joan is no slouch. In her complaint she charged that Koci was "an alien agitator, former Communist, and now a Trotskyite—preaching teaching and advocating the violent overthrow of the United States Government."

Koci is now free under \$1,000 bail raised by the Socialist Party

(Left Wing). His defense is being conducted by the A.C.L.U. At the first hearing of the case, the extremely contradictory nature of Dodson's testimony left no alternative to the inspector in charge but to recommend a dismissal of the case to the Labor Department in Washington.

But the Labor Department doesn't confine itself to facts when it wants to rid the country of a militant worker. It simply sent the case back to San Francisco for another hearing, this time appointing Red-baiter Meads as the inspector in charge. Mr. Meads understood the hint and put the two arresting officers on the stand. They confirmed each other's lies that Koci had admitted the charges against him were true. Presto! the Labor Department had what it wanted—a recommendation for deportation.

It is interesting to note that not a word has been uttered about this "frame-up" in the "Western Worker" or any of the other Communist Party sheets.

It is obvious from the way this case has developed that the Labor Department wants Koci out of the country and will not be easily dissuaded. Only immediate and vigorous action on the part of workers everywhere will be able to throw a monkey wrench in the department's plans.

by a sit-down in the foundry at the Cadillac plant. The days and weeks to come will probably see a wave of such defensive actions throughout the General Motors Corporation.

The realization is slowly beginning to dawn upon ever broader sections of auto workers that only a rank and file group armed with a fighting policy can stave off the attacks of General Motors. And further, this policy must be coupled with a campaign for rank and file control of the UAW. That such a group is not the Unity Group has been abundantly demonstrated at the General Motors Conference and the entire period following the convention.

The letter giving General Motors disciplinary powers in the plants sent by the Executive Board on September 15th was adopted unanimously by the GEB which includes the two leaders of the Unity Group, Walter Reuther and Windham Mortimer. The issue of the Conveyor, organ of the West Side Local, appearing immediately before the G.M. conference gives back-handed support to the letter. "No concessions," it declares, "granted to the company should become effective until the entire agreement is ratified. This applies particularly to the letter." Louis Spisak, Pres. of Fisher Body Local 45 of Cleveland and leading member of the Unity Group joins the chorus declaring that the letter "was the most practical move we could have made." (United Automobile Worker, Nov. 13th).

Martin and Reuther "Make Up"

Throughout the entire fall season when the plants were working on the 1938 models and G. M. could not afford a strike, Martin's policy of "respectability" and "responsibility" was supplemented by the restraining hand of the Unity Group whose deliberate policy was do-nothing until the elections were over. Rumors were rife during the two-day G. M. conference that Martin was about to patch up his quarrel with Reuther. Indeed Martin's

statement that the G. M. conference was "the beginning of the end of factionalism in the UAW" brought Reuther to his feet with three cheers for the President. No questions were asked concerning the restoration of democracy or instituting a military policy. The Unity boys were dreaming about reinstatement on their jobs.

Nothing would please the so-called Communist party better than a patch-up on the top. Not that they want unity for the sake of a fighting policy and rank and file control. Just the contrary. Gebert in the October "Communist" writes that policy of the Communist party is "against unauthorized strikes." This is the shield behind which every reactionary in the UAW concealed his real class collaboration program. If any one group is responsible for "unauthorized" strikes, says Gebert, it is the Lovestoneites. This should make a horse laugh. The entire campaign against shop action in the UAW was wholeheartedly approved if not instigated by the Lovestoneites.

Rank and File Movement Necessary

The Lovestoneites have stooged for Martin and Frankenstein in every reactionary policy in the recent period. They approved his prohibition of local union papers, applauded his letter to General Motors, defended Martin for drawing a gun on a rank and file delegation and denounced the delegation as "irresponsible hoodlums," etc., etc., etc. The Stalinists covet the Lovestoneite positions and given half a chance, the C. P. would go to such lengths as to make Martin's present stooges look like progressive unionists.

The rank and file can expect nothing from the Unity Group but new capitulations. Certainly it can expect no policy of struggle. The resistance to General Motors and the organization of the Ford Motor Company depend in great part upon a strong rank and file movement based on progressive militant principles.