

Union's bureaucracy blustering at Chrysler

OK, so the blustering and posing that precedes most auto industry-UAW negotiations serve the same purpose as the prebout muscle flexing on Big Time Wrestling. I still have to marvel at the direction the Chrysler talks have been taking lately.

Chrysler has long been a hotbed for labor relations anyway. From the days in the 1960s when Chrysler workers seized control of the plants for days on end to so-called "heat walkouts" of the 1970s that arbitrarily stopped production even while management was begging in Washington for more money to keep operating, Chrysler hasn't been a model of modern industrial relations.

BUT MARC Stepp, who is on the verge of retiring from a decade or so of running the Chrysler department for the UAW, has a record of success as a negotiator on par with Neville Chamberlain.

In the middle of Chrysler's bleakest days, Doug Fraser, a former Chrysler department head and then president of the UAW, negotiated a seat on the Chrysler board of directors and a lucrative profit-sharing plan for the employees in exchange for some painful pay cuts.

The board seat and the profit-sharing plan were hailed as major victories by the old guard at the UAW, who remembered the old days when the likes of Fraser and Walter Reuther would have been charged with communist thinking.

BUT STEPP couldn't sell the idea



auto talk
Dan McCosh

of profit-sharing to Chrysler workers, even in a year when the individual payout would have been more than \$5,000 per employee. Later he oversaw the splitting away of the Canadian UAW, which seriously diluted the bargaining power of the U.S. group.

With that kind of record, it isn't difficult to see why Stepp is anxious to play hardball these days, lest he stir some unpleasant memories in the minds of his members.

Now, as early negotiations begin, we have Stepp and the Chrysler team fighting to keep an antiquated car, the K-car — which likely will be out of production altogether in the United States in a couple of years — at Detroit's Jefferson plant. This is a couple of months after he negotiated a deal with Chrysler to move production of a former AMC plant in Kenosha, Wis., to Jefferson Avenue.

DID STEPP honestly think the Omni-Horizon cars were going to be assembled on the roofs of cars already in the plant? Is this why a strike is threatened?

We also are supposed to believe

Stepp sat in on the negotiations that led to a \$40 million subsidy from the city of Detroit for expansion at Jefferson — a sum about equal to two years pay for every job in the plant — without once glancing at the production plans.

Solid reasons for a strike threat? The UAW under Doug Fraser did some world-class negotiating in the 1970s, a time when auto employment dropped by a third and the industry itself was in danger of extinction.

Jobs were lost, but the pay and benefits that make the industry the highest paid in the country mainly survived.

BUT THE UAW has undergone a basic change in style since the retirement of Fraser — the last representative of the UAW's founding idealism.

In its place is the style of a professional bureaucracy, anxious to preserve its own interest, even at the expense of the employees the union is supposed to represent.

Dan McCosh is the automotive editor of Popular Science.

marketplace

Fleury Studios Inc. of Troy is celebrating its 50th year of continuous operation.

Dobbs Furniture has opened its first Thomastonville Gallery in Troy.

Sarah Wolk Associates of Birmingham was named relations/marketing counsel for AmeriCenters Inc.

Performance Resource Corp. of Troy has established a new division, EAP Search Group.

Lovio-George Inc. was selected to provide marketing services for Ophthalmology Associates of Southfield.

Plumb Shop of Southfield received

national recognition for outstanding achievement for marketing its consumer plumbing products. The Plumb Shop is a division of Brass-Craft Manufacturing Co.

Franklin Savings and Loan of Southfield received approval from the State of Michigan Department of Commerce to open a Birmingham branch office.

Lovio-George Inc. was selected by Engineering Service Inc., Southfield, to handle public relations and marketing.

Analytical Technologies Inc. of Birmingham has a new computer software system available to help municipalities and government

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Staff Builders of Lathrup Village has changed its name to Metrostaff.

MVP Communications of Troy received an Award of Excellence at the International Television Association Greater Detroit Chapter's awards festival.

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