

# Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

The facts Big Labor bosses would rather you didn't hear about.

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*Compulsory unionism breeds corruption. In each issue of "Exposed," the National Right to Work Committee will highlight yet another example of union-boss abuse spawned and perpetuated by Big Labor's government-granted privilege to force workers to pay union dues, or be fired.*

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## **Delusions of Autoworkers Union Bosses, Weak-Willed Managers Cost GM and Delphi Workers Their Jobs**

The massive new job cuts announced by General Motors November 21, which followed on the heels of the October bankruptcy filing by Delphi, GM's former parts maker, were bitterly bemoaned the next day by United Auto Workers (UAW) union President Ron Gettelfinger and Vice President Richard Shoemaker.

GM managers' decision to shut down 12 factories in the U.S. and Canada and cut 30,000 jobs by 2008 is, according to Gettelfinger and Shoemaker, "extremely disappointing, unfair and unfortunate . . ." Only tacitly acknowledging the company is hemorrhaging cash, with \$4 billion in net losses in 2005 alone, they lectured that GM's "return to prosperity depends on its offering products that consumers find attractive, exciting, and want to buy."

The UAW union officials who wield "exclusive" (monopoly) power to negotiate employee contracts with management, claimed Gettelfinger and Shoemaker, bear no responsibility for the company's failure to manufacture marketable cars. That is "the exclusive responsibility of management."

As millions of hard-working front-line employees in the automotive and other American industries could tell you, the Gettelfinger/Shoemaker thesis that production workers need not trouble themselves with pleasing customers is a dangerous delusion.

Unfortunately, it's a delusion long harbored by weak-willed GM managers as well as irresponsible UAW bigwigs.

Among auto industry analysts, there's no dispute that to fulfill the needs and desires of today's consumers at a reasonable cost, plants must be flexible. Autoworkers must be able to assemble different types of vehicles on the same line. And engineers must be able to work with manufacturing teams to get new products launched quickly. However, at GM and other major manufacturers, UAW officers have seriously hampered workers' ability to help their companies succeed.

In U.S. plants owned by the so-called “Big Three” auto manufacturers – GM, Ford, and Daimler-Chrysler – UAW bosses wield monopoly-bargaining power over production employees. Employees may not negotiate with management over their work rules, pay and benefits individually or through another agent.

UAW-negotiated contracts require rigid job classifications that render plants inflexible and waste time and money. Under a UAW contract, a “skilled tradesman” may be required to change a fuse in an assembly-line machine, although virtually any assembly-line worker could be trained to do the job.

Furthermore, managers cannot assign additional work to employees who have begun working faster after mastering a task without entering into a potentially lengthy “consultation” with a UAW official.

Given that they operate under many such UAW-imposed constraints, it’s not surprising that, as of the beginning of this year, more than half of GM’s U.S. and Canadian plants were making only one model. In contrast, more than 80% of the lines in Toyota and Nissan’s U.S. and Canadian plants are flexible. Toyota and Nissan’s American employees receive pay and benefits similar to those of Big Three employees, but aren’t subject to UAW monopoly control.

When a GM, Ford, or Chrysler plant is dedicated to making a model that doesn’t sell well, managers usually have no choice but to lay off employees and cut shifts. But the plants still carry enormous fixed costs for utilities, equipment, and unemployment benefits. That makes it extremely difficult for these companies to price cars and trucks competitively.

For decades, GM and other unionized auto and auto-parts manufacturers have known that union work rules were progressively undermining their competitiveness, but apparently counted on new machines or trick processes to circumvent their fundamental problem. Clearly, their “look the other way” approach has failed.

Even before the recent GM announcement, the number of Big Three manufacturing jobs in the U.S. had already fallen to roughly 240,000 from 340,000 in 1993. Meanwhile, Toyota, Nissan, and other foreign automakers, which are overwhelmingly nonunion, increased their U.S. jobs by 60,000.

The auto industry’s experience makes it crystal clear that American workers who receive excellent pay and benefits can successfully vie for manufacturing jobs with workers all over the world. But they can’t if they are straight-jacketed by the sort of counterproductive union work rules that the UAW hierarchy continues to insist on, even as more and more UAW-“represented” workers’ jobs disappear.

And that’s why the single most important step elected officials in Washington could take to help the beleaguered employees of the Big Three and Delphi would be to revoke the current federal authorization for union monopoly bargaining over all private-sector workers.

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