

Rush Limbaugh backs 50 percent pay cut for auto workers

By Patrick Martin
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Right-wing radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh devoted his Tuesday commentary to the struggle of workers at the Indianapolis General Motors stamping plant against demands for a 50 percent wage cut. He expressed understanding for the actions of GM and the United Auto Workers union (UAW) in seeking to push through the wage cuts, and scorn for the workers who are resisting.

Limbaugh quoted extensively from the report posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* Tuesday morning, under the headline “Indianapolis autoworkers drive United Auto Workers executives out of meeting”. He described, using the WSWs account, how the workers shouted down three UAW international union representatives when they tried to present the wage cut and other proposed contract changes to facilitate sale of the plant.

Limbaugh gloated over the treatment dealt the UAW officials. “The shoe’s on the other foot,” he said. “Now the UAW’s executives are the owners and they’re trying to tell their own brethren to take 50 cents on the dollar. The national UAW are the bosses. Now that they effectively own Obama Motors, they’re the ones riding the backs of the proletariat—and it shows up on the *World Socialist Web Site*!”

Limbaugh noted the commercial motives underlying the policy of the union. “UAW management wants to sell the company,” he said, “and so they’re getting UAW workers to take a 50 percent pay cut on the opening wage, just to stay profitable. The UAW, now that they own it, the executives want their bonuses based on profitability—and what are they doing? They’re asking for labor cuts!”

He concluded, “They’re not doing what they would normally do if they were on the other side of the aisle. They’re acting just like management does in these

situations everywhere around the world.”

While Limbaugh enjoyed himself at the expense of the union officials, he was entirely on their side when it comes to demanding a 50 percent pay cut. He criticized the WSWs report for describing the plan to “cut wages from an average of \$29 an hour to \$15.50.” According to Limbaugh, “Now that’s not quite correct. The new contract would cut the base wage, that’s the starting wage. The starting wage is \$29. It would cut the starting wage from \$29 to \$15.50 an hour, which is still more than the other auto manufacturing plants in the area pay, including other Obama Motors plants. Needless to say, ladies and gentlemen, these figures do not include overtime or the lavish benefits and pension packages and so forth.”

Here is the real class position of Limbaugh. For all his posturing at being the populist voice of “real” America, he is a multi-millionaire who speaks for the interests of the most backward and reactionary sections of the financial aristocracy. He knows nothing about the real conditions of life of the American working class.

It is doubtful that Limbaugh is aware of the conditions that prevail in American factories today, or if he has ever set foot in one. He is clearly unfamiliar with the elementary difference between the base wage (paid to all hourly workers, with additions for special skills or tasks) and the starting wage (paid to newly hired workers.) The wage for new-hires at GM plants was reduced to \$14 an hour in accordance with the terms demanded by the Obama administration last year in return for government aid to the company. The UAW fully supported the wage cut, along with a six-year no-strike clause.

However, no GM plant has reduced the base rate for veteran workers to that level—not yet at least. To

accomplish such a level of wage-cutting, GM and the UAW have resorted to ownership shuffles like that being attempted at the Indianapolis plant.

Limbaugh's reference to the "lavish benefits and pension packages" supposedly enjoyed by auto workers is a clear statement of his venomous hostility to the working class and the gains American workers won through the struggles of past generations. For his years of rhetorical bootlicking of American capitalism, the right-wing blowhard has amassed a personal fortune estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Yet he can fulminate about the modest benefits that auto workers accrued over decades of toil under frequently hellish conditions.

Limbaugh closed his commentary by admitting that he expected to receive critical e-mails asking, "Are you really laughing at the misfortune of people who are having half their salaries taken away?"

His reply was to claim that he was laughing, not at the workers, but at the UAW. "They just now happen to be owners," he said. "Look what happened to them when they become owners: They learn that the single biggest cost in running a business is labor, and that if you're not showing a profit, and if you need to very quickly, the first thing you can look to cut is labor costs.

It's the way of the world. It just is. It's a sad thing, but it just is."

Not too sad, apparently, because this observation touched off a fit of laughter from the commentator, detailed in the transcript posted on his web site. "Who else but the United Auto Workers would have the chutzpah to demand that they cut their salaries by half?" he chortled. "I don't know that General Motors ever went that far. I don't know that Chrysler went that far. If the rank-and-file don't accept this deal, outsource the jobs. (laughing) I mean, teach the lesson! (laughing) If they're... (laughing). I can't believe Limbaugh is having so much fun over this."

Then he sobered up, calling the Indianapolis event "just too big a teachable moment," because China, Vietnam and India "all have cheaper labor," and consequently Americans must work cheaper too. In any case, he argued, the wage cut was not really that severe.

"They're cutting it back to \$15.50 an hour," he calculated. "\$15.50 is \$620 from a 40-hour week, which is \$32,240 a year. That's starting. That does not

include overtime or benefits. That's the base starting salary. The median salary in the US is still somewhere under \$40,000."

In other words, the workers in Indianapolis have nothing really to complain about. They should be happy they're still making more than the brutally exploited workers in Asia, at least until further wage cuts equalize workers around the world at the bottom.

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