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This interview has been transcribed and edited for accuracy/clarity.

Keith: Welcome to “On the Line” podcast where we're sitting down with Mike Van Boekel, Plant Chair of Unifor Local 88 (GM Cami Plant). The intention of this podcast is to give a review of what's going on within our local and answer questions that our members may have that have been asked in the past.

Keith: Welcome Mike.

Mike: Good morning.

Keith: This past week was quite busy for our local at the beginning of the week. Our delegates attended Ontario Regional Council which is a Unifor conference our delegates are elected to in our (triennial) elections. How many people do we send?

Mike: I believe it's 15.

Keith: So 15 people were sent. Can you describe what happens during Ontario Regional Council?

Mike: That's the government of Unifor for Ontario. There is a Western council, there is Eastern, Quebec and there's Ontario. All the bylaws are debated there. Any resolutions (there are normally around a dozen) that any locals are allowed to submit. They go to the (National) Executive Board who either back some or don't. And they give their opinion on it and then they ask the delegates to vote on each one after some debate.

It's a three day conference so it's Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Usually about half a dozen guest speakers, usually a couple of political leaders. This year we had Andrea Horwath, the provincial leader of the NDP and we also had Tracey Ramsey, who's a federal NDP member out of Windsor Essex. And then we have a variety of different guest speakers.

Lots of points of orders. Usually a couple of fundraisers because of something happening in someone's community. And it's just it's basically the politics of the Ontario Unifor arm.

Keith: Ok. And what are the campaigns that they highlighted that they're going to be doing this year? The main issues Unifor will campaign for or against this coming year?

Mike: Right now they're really against Doug Ford and the Ontario PC Party. More about his reforms and a lot of his cutbacks. Some are understandable but he's taking the knife pretty hard.

They're also mounting a strong campaign for the federal election in 2019 locally in October. They had a lot of speakers on the on the federal election as well. More Ontario based. The minimum wage to go to \$15 dollars an hour was talked about quite a bit.

Safety always gets a big play. We have good language in our plan. We have three excellent (in my opinion) full time reps who cover safety. It is unusual. Most places of work don't have them, especially the small places have no safety so they go through a lot of safety rules where people should be looking for stuff like that. Also, Bill 148 is coming in. Doug Ford has deleted or repealed most of the legislation that the Liberal government did which was really one of the some of the strongest language we've ever had for workers and most of it's been repealed so we're trying to wade through that.

And of course Jerry Dias spoke for a long time and a lot of the recent GM news about closing, future product and then of course, the big picture with GM worldwide also got a lot of attention.

Keith: All right. So going back to Bill 148, has that ship sailed? Has that bill already been repealed? Is there nothing that we can actually do to stop the forward progress of the repealing of that bill?

Mike: As far as I know, there's nothing they can do, it's already been repealed officially. Obviously the NDP, Liberals and everybody else, the Green Party all spoke against it but they went through all the points. I've got the handouts on my desk that we're still going through. They did keep some of it, some of the important stuff was kept. The violence against women section that was all kept but everything from the 7 days the two days paid for part time workers, all that was repealed. The minimum notice to cancel shifts, all that stuff has been repealed and that we're just trying to wait for the official paperwork to show us what we have left and then of course for CAMI, GM, Ford and Chrysler to see what they're going to do next.

Keith: So do you think we're going to lose our seven days.

Mike: I hope not.

Keith: ...and go back to the average rule.

Mike: I hope not but I know they're meeting about the GM plans and have already gotten together. They've done conference calls and they're looking it over. I would not be surprised if they tried to roll out a new attendance policy again.

Keith: So as far as January is concerned, if our members are at a certain amount of days does your attendance reset. January 1st?

Mike: Yep, it does reset right now with where the policy is at. You get seven days again regardless of where your attendance is at. You get seven free days starting January 1st.

Keith: So let's talk about Oshawa. This past week, GM announced that they were closing five plants. Four in the (United) States and one here (in Canada). Three production plants and two engine supply plants. Why do you think GM is doing this?

Mike: I think they're responding to what Ford did about six months ago. I think they're responding to how the worldwide movement has gone away from cars. North America specifically is going heavily into pickup trucks, SUVs and crossovers. From what we understand officially we believe GM is closing 10 to 12 plants worldwide including a couple of lower cost ones in Korea, South America and they're taking a hard hit in Europe as well. Europe's cars are still selling but I do know the profit margin on the cars is tight. And as Ford did and we are expecting Chrysler to come out in the next few months, as well, they're moving all their production to Mexico, which unfortunately is just a cheap place to make vehicles.

Keith: How do we compete with Mexico? Can we?

Mike: I don't believe we do. Cost-wise, I don't believe we can compete with them we have no intention of competing with them. It's not comparing apples to apples whatsoever. Where we can compete and where I think we excel is (quality). I would like to think it's more important. I'm not so sure GM does because it's strictly about money but we are number one. North America is much better but especially the CAMI plant, we are number one in almost every metric that they measure. Our quality is second to none. We are gonna be BIQ4 awarded I believe by Friday. It might be Monday but I know right now it's sitting with GM to review everything and it sounds like we will come in with the highest BIQ4 score ever, once they complete it. No plant has averaged 96 percent yet. I believe we're at 95.8 right now will probably be 96 sometime in February or March. That alone will set us apart from all the other plants. But then you add on everything else, we are the leanest plant. You can argue right or wrong but I believe in every cost outside of the labour rate we are leading them in every category. Obviously salary would be included in that. There are salaried (staff) that make a lot more than Mexican salaried staff make, but we can't compare apples to apples.

Mike: They're gonna go to Mexico because all the other automakers are already there. Toyota is building a five billion dollar plant right now that will be launched, I believe, next year. Volkswagen has announced a monster plant that they're going to build which will take two years and they already have a deal made with the government that I believe rolls the wages back an additional hour from what we have read the Volkswagen plant will start at \$1.50 an hour and that's already been signed off with the government for the first couple of years. So even though they're down to around \$2.50 to \$3 bucks an hour they're already trying to figure out ways to keep that wage down there and go against the workforce. It's a terrible scene down there. The other thing that we that Mexico doesn't have that we do, they have very lax safety laws, very lax human rights laws, which is unfortunate. They're just exploiting the workers. But again it saves the companies a lot of money. But I do believe quality wise, we are by far number one.

Keith: So what would you say to a member that says no matter what we do BIQ4, quality...we've been there before, we've been the top plant, we lost our Terrain. What would you say to the members that think this is all for naught? That at the end of the day GM is going to decide what they want to do regardless of where we stand as far as all the other plants.

Mike: I think they've proven that. One thing GM is saying that they are going to build vehicles where they sell vehicles. They may be, but I don't believe they're doing it really by remote comparison or percentages if they are there. They have told us they're going to keep one plant open in Canada. It looks like it will be CAMI, which is fantastic news for the plant. Fantastic news for our members but it is extremely unfortunate for the Oshawa plant. I understand they're still going to battle it and I mean I hope they come through with it. I hope they get some kind of product. But I do believe the CAMI plant will be here for a long, long time. I would like to think I know we're putting big changes in for 2021 to the Equinox which is supposed to get us to 2023. So hopefully, sometime in the next year, the next 6 to 18 months will be an announcement for the empty spot down the body shop and hopefully a new paint shop with it and that will keep us going for another 20 plus years.

Keith: So in regards to the closure, where were you when you heard the news? remember?

Mike: I know exactly where I was. My daughter's actually working in Toronto right now. She's in Grade 8. She's working as a legislative page at Queen's Park for five weeks. We were driving her to Toronto. My phone went off and it goes off a lot but it went off. It was a text message from (Unifor) National from Jerry Dias' office. It was in red lettering which I have never seen before. And it said conference call at 5:45pm and this was 5:15pm. It was in 30 minutes. It was sent out to me, Tim McKinnon who's the Plant Chair of St. Catharines, Greg Moffatt, the Plant Chair of Oshawa, and it said "Greg Moffatt: also have your bargaining master committee on this phone call. You

guys have approximately 35 minutes to get this done.” So my wife read it to me as we were driving on the 401 down by the airport. We had half an hour. I wanted to get my daughter dropped off. She's billeting there. We want to get her dropped off and get back on the road because there was obviously no way I was going to get home in time to sit there. My wife drove, I sat there. I always have a pen and pad of paper in both of my vehicles including a copy of our contract because it comes in handy a lot.

Mike: Anyhow, Greg Moffatt called me about 15 minutes later. Greg Moffatt is the chair of Oshawa. We have become pretty close. We've both been chairs a long time. He was pretty upset. He asked “did you get the email?” And I said yeah and he said “I've never seen one in red lettering. He said they want my bargaining team. Mike, this is the end of it. I believe we're done.” And I said “yeah”. We speak pretty frank. There's no need to bullshit between him and I. I said “no, this is a bad one.” They don't do this for good news obviously. They're giving us a heads up because GM was going to make an announcement this morning. About half an hour later Jerry Dias came on the phone with his four or five guys. And we talked for over an hour about the plant closure and what's going to happen with Oshawa. A lot of different scenarios. How to tell the members? Do you keep it quiet? What you do? Because in twelve hours GM was going to come out with it at 10 o'clock the next morning and announce it.

We agreed it wasn't something you hold back from members. They were coming in at midnight shift so Moffatt wanted get there on days and at least get the day (shift) workers out of there. And then eventually they walked out at 9:00am in the morning instead which I thought was a pretty strong move.

Keith: Definitely a strong message sent to GM that they're not going to back down for sure. Who was the first person you talked to in our plant?

Mike: I called Joe Graves right after I got the text. I told him what was going on. He is our president as everyone knows and then Joe asked me for an update right after the phone call hung up. He called me probably 20 minutes into the text. Some of our members started calling because someone leaked it to the press and the press was off and running with it. And by 10:00pm that night it was an absolute mess. My phone should have overheated because there were a lot of people calling asking “what's going on with Oshawa. Was there something coming for CAMI?” I can't blame our members because all of a sudden you're sitting on egg shells when you started hearing that GM...

I didn't like the way they worded it. Jerry Dias did say it looks like GM is pulling out of Canada. That's not true. Everybody's had a chance to catch our breath now. We still have St. Catharines which is about 1400 members. The (Woodstock) warehouse does extremely well even though

there's only 85 members there, and our plant which is extremely busy obviously not 6 days a week but we are three strong shifts so I don't believe GM is going anywhere, other than there's gonna be a big fight over the Oshawa plant which is not looking very promising right now.

(For transparency purposes, the inplant memo that was released last week about our show was actually dictated to me (Keith) over the phone by Mike (Van Boekel). As you can hear from Mike, he was quite busy, so he thought that would be the best way to get some information out. So, if there were any errors or omissions in that memo or it created more questions I apologize. That was my first time doing a dictation so hopefully it's definitely something we will work on in the future)

Keith: Talk about our plant closure penalty. Why is it difficult for GM to close this plant compared to Oshawa?

Mike: Our language is actually very similar. We actually doubled everything in our last contract so it used to say six months' closure. Now we have one year closure and we used to say three months' notice on a layoff and now we have six months' notice on a layoff. The big difference is the Americans. The UAW only have four months' notice and that's why they're taking the first plant down in the States in four months' time and then I believe six months later they're shutting the second plant down. The first plant is getting laid off completely and then shut down two months later and the second plant they have just told them it's just six months completely. That's Hamtramck and Lordstown and now they are going after the Baltimore plant as well. I don't have a time frame because that plant makes the transmissions and engines for the pickup trucks which are selling huge. I hate seeing competition but they are also the same stuff as made at St. Catharines plant. So, St. Catharines could have gone down but they've chosen Baltimore instead, which is a fairly big plant same size as St. Catharines so it looks like St. Catharines will keep on rolling and hopefully have an investment as well.

Mike: We did absolutely bump our closure language up big time last round of bargaining. It was the last thing to come. We couldn't get the letter that we really wanted to keep our product in the plant. So it was Dan Borthwick who said "let's change our language around and protect the plant a different way". And then the committee worked on it from there. We bumped up our plant closure fund by \$100 million to \$290 million. It was \$190 million and if people remember well, two contracts ago it was \$40.4 million.

So in two contracts, we went from \$40.4 million to close our plant to \$290 million to close our plant. If we did not do that I believe our plant would be closing right now not Oshawa. It's not even a question, they would have 100 percent been the one that was closing. However, right now the \$290 million dollars (to close us) that would be tough for GM. Oshawa was telling us 3-500 people are eligible to retire. We have close to 1500 people that have 28.1 years. I know the London Free

Press ran a story last week that said 21 years of service. That was totally wrong. That was an interview with me. He just wrote it wrong.

Mike: You need 28.1 years. If someone has 28.1 years of service (that's after the closure would kick in) so right now if you had 27.1, you'd be fine because obviously they're not affected. We're not affected right now so they'd have to give you a one year notice. It's 28.1 years AFTER the one year of notice. So right now we have roughly 1500 people that would fall into that. Those people would all get paid full pay right until you get out, until you hit 30 years and then you get your full pension. There's no cuts on your pension. Obviously other than the issue we have going on right now that we are grieving, but you'll get your full pension. The cost would be astronomical right now to close our plant, let alone the \$290 million on top of that they're going to pension everybody off at a very early age. So do I believe that's come into play. Absolutely. Huge cost to GM which I believe is forcing them to keep our plant open along with the fact that they keep telling publicly that they're going to produce vehicles in countries that they sell including Canada. So I believe, I honestly do believe our plant is going to be here. I believe the next 20, 30 years we're fine.

Keith: Well that's some good news. As far as our contract book is concerned there is no official letter or language in their contract book about the plant closure. There is some language in our benefits book about the plant closure in regards to VTEP. Things like that. Is that the same kind of thing?

Mike: No, we do have language I think it's page 117 or page 116. I think it's right around there. It does spell it out. You have to know what the intent was and how we read it but it does refer to 28.1 in that language. It refers you to the benefit book but it's very clear how we worded it and how the intent was that it was 28.1 for closure. It is black and white that they have to give one year notice. So, I'm comfortable with that they already understand how much the cost would be, we've gone through this with the company and how much it would cost us. That's how we got to 290 million because we wanted to make sure everybody was covered. The first fifteen hundred had to get to 28.1. And then if they did close the plant closure language will kick in even higher penalties. So it'll be interesting to see. That's kind of in the air. It's definitely higher penalties to close a plant and then it's just a matter of how well you can bargain because I'm assuming Oshawa is going to come up with some big language or big money to close that plant

(Keith: Just so our members know if you're looking for that information and our benefits book it's page 47-58. It's ten pages of language in regards to that and VTEP etc.) So we definitely encourage members to read that benefits book as boring and as exhausting it is to read. You can definitely learn a lot of things in there. Make sure you read our collective agreement.

Mike: It's Letter 14, Job Security and plant closure language is Page 116,117 and it takes you all through different parts of the benefit book then it will refer you to different parts. We believe it's black and white. And the company has already talked to us about it so we believe perfectly fine.

Keith: Ok. So you're comfortable with.

Mike: Yes, we're comfortable with that. The goal is not to get there.

Keith: That's obviously a great goal to have.

Keith: The goal is to keep working and at the end of the day we know this is GM. They make decisions about you know willy-nilly. So not everything is ironclad. We understand that for sure.

Keith: What is Unifor planning in regards to fight back or a push-back. And obviously we can't release too much information now but maybe some ideas of some campaigns or something that they might be trying to do?

Mike: Yeah, Jerry Dias talked to us specifically, a few of us. I'll say the leadership, the head leadership of the plants. He's talking about staging wildcats, walkouts, staggered ones or all together. I'll be right up front. We talked to him myself and the plant chair of St. Catharines. We don't believe it's the best time right now. We believe everybody should sit back collect their breath. See what the language is going to say and see what GM is going to say in the new year. Obviously GM just picked certain plants to close. There's nothing to say they can't change their mind. St. Catharine's sidestepped a bomb because there were in a lot of trouble as well. And it looks like the Baltimore plant is going down, so, their plant chair and I spoke and we didn't think it was the best time right now for our plants to do a wildcat. Everybody knows we were on strike last year for five weeks, so, we just want to let it calm down a little bit, get some thinking and start thinking rational about what we can do and if Jerry Dias asked every plant in Canada (which is really Ontario) but it's Ford, Chrysler, GM and everybody to go off for one day we'll talk to our members about doing that because at some point it could be us in the same position as any other plant. We hope not.

Mike: What people really do need to realize is how this affects the supplier chain, which has a huge effect on our plant, suppliers go after GM contracts. Some of our suppliers actually will supply Ford or Chrysler. A lot of our suppliers supply Toyota as well. You start losing plants, the suppliers start losing interest and they will leave. They'll follow where the plants are going. A lot of our suppliers have set up shop in Mexico, the southern states and all of a sudden you start losing some big plants whether it be GM, Ford, Toyota...the suppliers will leave. If they stay they'll want more money. And all of a sudden GM is not holding all the cards anymore. So it does make a big difference if a plant closes to our plant strictly on a price per vehicle for parts. So it is important to

keep that supplier chain going. Keep the trucks and trains going because a lot of the trucking companies will take parts from GM take them somewhere, bring Ford parts back, and they want to haul full loads everywhere they go. So a lot of people don't understand the intricacies of the dealerships and how everything works between all the big three and including Ford and Toyota and Honda in Canada.

Mike: So it does make it an effect if one sells or closes or a new one sets up shop as well. It does help us so we don't want to lose the industry. You don't want two or three plants left because then the supplier base will leave and then we're in a lot of trouble not just because there's no plants left.

Keith: Just to backtrack to the wildcats, just so our members know, any kind of wildcat (a strike while there is an active contract) is illegal as per the Rand formula under the Canada Labour Code and could leave the Local subject to massive fines from the government.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rand_formula

Keith: Now that brings me to the next question. Oshawa has a contract. How can GM break it?

Mike: That's up to the lawyers to look into that right now. Usually they say that nothing will change ever. Everybody will be fully employed provided that the state of the business is where it is today. They're going to argue that they're closing the plant that builds the Impala so obviously the spillover to Oshawa is gone. There goes a part of their membership. Cadillacs are not selling because it's a car. So they're going to argue that the state of the business has changed. The pickup trucks are selling extremely well. There is no weld shop at the Oshawa plant. They bring everything (truck bodies) in by trains that are already built on frames. The white bodies are brought in and then they join them and paint them and finish and trim them out. Obviously they only build up to the 2019 model and that will be done by next fall.

Mike: And then they're into 2020s which they are not tooled to do so they're going to argue rightfully that they can do the spill over for the 2020 because pickup trucks sell like crazy which is extremely good for GM because that's their biggest, most profitable vehicle. And hopefully Oshawa can keep on building them as the overflow until they can get a product. Obviously we're in the mix too. We are looking for product. They spoke up very clearly saying, "look there's not just Oshawa in this country." CAMI will be looking for a new product sooner than later as well. We have a 400,000 square foot weld shop that's begging for vehicles as well. So they're looking for products at both locations but we're not going to be forgotten about either.

Keith: What if Oshawa comes and pickets our entrances. What would you advise our members to do?

Mike: I would advise us not to cross the picket lines. I know that's going to be extremely tough for a lot of people because we have bills to pay. What people have to understand is, Oshawa went through last year when we ran them out of parts because we were on strike and we couldn't take their parts, they laid off people. St. Catharines got laid off (one line). They do not collect short workweek if it's affected by another plant. That's GM language. That's language for Ford plants and Chrysler plants. So if it's parts shortage because of an act of God or weather or a supplier that's one thing, but if it's a GM plant taking down a GM plant that are assembly plants you don't get short workweek. But, people need to remember that this could be us at some point, maybe at some time. Right now, Ford is down to one plant in Canada for assembly, Chrysler have two, we (GM) have two. They may ask the other plants to help picket our plant or we'll help picket another plant. Sometimes you've got to look at it's a bigger picture than just our plant. I believe our plant is safe long term.

Mike: Yeah, we may have to picket for a day here and a day there overall but we can't just run willy nilly and shut our plant down right now. I do believe it needs to be thought out and we know what the repercussions are. That's my opinion.

Keith: So I guess the best the better or the bigger question now is how quickly does GM get the parts that Oshawa stamps for us going somewhere else so that it doesn't impact us in the future because I'm sure that would be an effective way for Oshawa to shut us down by not stamping our parts anymore.

Mike: Absolutely they have four parts that come out of Oshawa that we know of, that come here now. If they're saying they're going to close next fall, you can bet they're already looking especially with what just happened. We were almost out of parts last week. I'll be shocked if GM is not banking them up right now and taking an extra semi once a week so we can move them somewhere to a warehouse so it doesn't happen. But they are going to look at moving parts around.

In good news, our Stamping shop is going to get busier. They (GM) sat with us two weeks ago and told us they are looking to bring in two or three dies back to CAMI fairly quickly which is going to produce more work for our stamping shop. It may not be more hires for stamping it's just going to give them more work because they've got a lot of sitting around time right now or a lot of early go home options which is not what we want we try and bargain we try and get 40 hours for everybody. But it will lead to more work in the weld shop. We don't know how much yet but they're talking at least two to four jobs per shift in the Weld shop because we're going to start doing some more sub-assemblies in the Weld shop. Not only is that good, it's good work, it's easier work, so, it's good for our members as well.

Keith: Pref hire language. We have a lot of members that are concerned that people that are on (layoff with) recall rights may get bumped out from a pref. hire or maybe even people in here bumped out for a pref. hire. What is the language for pref. hires and are our current laid off members safe?

Mike: That's a very good question. Sunday night a week ago, when the word got leaked to the media some of the laid off people started calling me. Monday, it was an absolute zoo and I'll apologize right now. I tried to return every phone call, every text, every phone message I got. It just was not physically possible to do it a week ago Sunday and Monday. There was no way. I was getting phone calls on top of phone calls on top of phone calls so I do apologize. It was just impossible to return everybody's call and then we were walking right into meetings and we just couldn't return all the calls.

But back to the question. Our pref. hire language is extremely strong. All of our laid off people from Local 88 will 100 percent be called back to work regardless of what happens at Oshawa prior to anybody from Oshawa coming into our plant. I'm not here to slam Oshawa; that's the language they have as well.

Mike: It would be the exact same going the other way. So right now, everybody at CAMI who is working at CAMI cannot get bumped out. That includes the group that just got recalled yesterday and I explained that to them, so they're safe. The 301 people that are still out there will be recalled prior to any pref. hire coming from Oshawa to our plant. Now. It did happen once. that the EMD people actually bumped our people out. That was through a court order. We have changed our language since that time, so that will not happen again. And even at that time we weren't even aware it was going on. We weren't involved in a court case that was strictly between EMD, a judge and the union and then a judge ruled how he interpreted language. But that's been tightened up. I'm not here to slam the EMD people. That's what they got at that time. However our pref. hires (laid off workers) are 100 percent safe. Now. I can answer the next question which is probably coming and we do have pref. hire language included both ways. It's a two way street.

Mike: So if our plant was the one closing, the people with 15 years or one year would be able to go to Oshawa or St. Catharines (provided they're hiring). I believe all of our laid off members right now will be recalled to CAMI a year from now. That's my guess. We will have no layoffs. That's based on two things. We have an extreme high number of retirees next year. I'm going to guess somewhere around three to four hundred. We have 300 people currently laid off. We are finding out roughly 25% to one third are not accepting the recall (they've moved on) which is fine, that's their decision but that will also speed the recalls up for everybody else.

Mike: Woodstock. We've also made a very good deal with Woodstock. As their members retire they are taking our EMD people. It's slow but there's a few every year. And if new work gets added (and I believe we've got 14 people over there already) and it looks like more are gonna be going in January, from our laid off group, to go there full time and permanent. That will take another 20 people hopefully next year. So we are getting through the layoffs. Once that laid off list is done and we've completely gone through it all, we will then I'm assuming in 2020, we will be in a position to hire new people. That's when our pref. hire language will kick in. And that's where, if Unifor is unsuccessful at keeping the GM plant open that's where myself and our bargaining team is going to be in heavy talks because there is a possibility that the pref. hires will be all coming to CAMI in 2020. That's my guess.

Keith: So, in regards to that closure. So let's jump ahead and speak hypothetically. If Oshawa closes and GM only has St. Catharines (and Woodstock Warehouse) to bargain with, is there a potential that GM will ask us to completely join pattern bargaining and shack up with the other plants as far as bargaining at the same time is concerned?

Mike: I believe that is a possibility. I'm in my 13th year as plant chair had 11 years as a committee person before that. I have fought hard not to join the Big Three. Last year, at bargaining was probably the closest we've ever come and I'll be honest over the last few years I'm wondering if it's not the better thing to do. I know we'd have to talk to our members about it. In saying that, I believe we bargain separately, we remain autonomous. We are our own bargaining unit. If we voted it (contract) down, we are on strike. If we pass it then we're not on strike. But I believe bargaining at the same time might be the preferred way and I'm just speaking completely as experience with plant chair. but we would remain as a permanent separate contract from GM so our membership stands on their own. Then I would go ahead and do it if our membership backed it. But I believe it might be the right time. If Oshawa leaves, then you're gonna look at St. Catharines with twelve hundred members and Woodstock with 80 members so potentially fourteen hundred members are gonna set the bar with Ford and with Ford and Chrysler, but more with us on what we're supposed to try and gain. We out number them and I think we should have a lot more voice and I think the only way we're going to do that is to get to that table at the same time. Again, remain separate but then we can start setting the damn contracts around here and not have to follow every time.

Keith: Okay, so we mentioned earlier about the pension fight. For those that don't know about what's going on with pensions, maybe people that have been here you know 14 years or less that might not be vested in what's going on with pensions but definitely have an eye on the end game. Can you explain what GM is doing, what they're changing and what we're fighting?

Mike: Yeah absolutely. There's 527 people that COULD be affected by this. That does not necessarily mean there's 527 affected, but that could be the highest liability. It only affects you if

you're 54 years old or younger and you have 30 years of service. That's the only way it affects you. If you take the commuted value it does affect you but not nearly as bad. It's a little bit different on taxes but it's not a showstopper by any means.

We bargain the exact same contract for pensions as all the Big 3 do. What we have recently found out was that in the 1980s, we think it's around '83 (we're trying to find that out for 100 percent) this scenario came up. It's a pension law for Ontario and it's Ontario (tax) law, that your transition payment cannot be more than your pension payment. If you have 30 years in right now you get \$3515 per month pension. We've been told that since day one. The unions train people in that at UAT. The company gives everybody in this plant (provided you're with the DB pension) a yearly summary that says upon 30 years you're gonna get \$3515. That's black and white. That's in all the paperwork we have. It's been in all the talks we've had at bargaining with the intent between the two parties. So we had our first two people hit 30 and out last May. One was 48 the other one was around 50 or 52. After their first month they came back and said "hey I got my first check it's not \$3515". And for the 48 year old's case it's about \$300 short. It strictly goes by age. He took the 30 and out great for him. Everyone should have shook his hand, not trying to figure a way to screw him like GM did. Anyhow, he got less on his cheque. We took it over to the company. I wasn't even involved at this point, this was our benefit reps and pension reps doing it. They went over and talked to the company the company rep. said "well that's wrong. He should be getting \$3515". They were in the exact same boat as we were. They said "leave it with us we'll fix it". About two weeks later the company rep came back to us and said "we've got a big problem". That's where I got involved because they came and filled me in and said "hey... here's what's going on". I went over to the company. I actually ended up a Gary Duff's desk who's our plant manager. Gary Duff 100 percent backs us and says "you should be getting \$3515". The buck should stop there. He is the plant manager. However, it is GM Canada labour relations that have taken this over. Everybody has a boss and this guy runs all of GM labour relations including the pension funding.

Mike: It seems back in the 1980s, this first came up they made a letter out back in the 1980s that has every local including (all the ones that are closed from Ford, GM and Chrysler) that says the transition benefit can't be more than your pension benefit. When you retire early you get a monster transition payment. Ontario law came in the 1980s and says it can't be bigger than your actual pension money.

We don't really care. We just want \$3515 dollars. As Mike Murphy says "we don't care if they have a bake sale or a car wash as long as they come up with the money to give us \$3515 bucks a month", we don't care. But the government says your transition can't be higher. So what the Big 3 do including every auto plant in Ontario, all the GM, Ford and Chrysler, (those affected) retirees get a separate cheque once a month out of general funds from payroll. So our 48 year old retiree should get a cheque for around \$300 bucks once a month from payroll until he's 60 years old. At

60 years old it gets fixed automatically because the way the language is written the transition payment law kicks out because your pension payment gets bigger. So if you do retire it gets fixed. If you're 54 and think of retiring right now, you get less. At 60, it all gets fixed automatically. We want to be included in that letter. The letter doesn't say Local 88 yet because back in the 1980s early 80s we were even in the womb yet, we weren't born. We didn't really start until 1989, 1990. I lost my mind when this happened. We had no idea. It's never come up because obviously in the early 90s we start bargaining you start looking at pension stuff. Nobody thought of the language. Now roll the clock ahead to 2017 because that's when we bargained. Even 2011, 2012, 2010. Everybody that was in that language has either died or retired long ago. The new pension Rep for Unifor started six years ago. Wrongfully, I probably lost my mind on him and I started freaking out on him. His name's Corey. He's a hell of a good guy. He started yelling back. He says "Mike, you have every piece of language that we have. Everything's the same". Then, we started doing some digging. He didn't even know about this. It really isn't pension language. It comes more from the inplant language because it's a separate letter. It's not pension money. It comes from general funds. We didn't have any... I mean I'll take the blame. We had no idea about it. No one's ever seen it. It's not part of the contract; it's a definite letter that's been buried since the 80s. But everybody gets paid so we're taking the case on. We believe everybody should get the money. It's a pattern. Most of our money is pattern. We make the same money that's going to be arguments with the lawyers, when we go to court that our money is the same. Our pension fund we get \$3515. So GM has found a way to get around on a stupid loophole.

We believe we've got a very strong case. In saying that, we are not on that letter so I am a long way from saying to anybody it's a hundred percent sure. I am currently 50 years old. I would be 52 if I elected to retire. I don't think I'm going to but it affected me right between the eyes as well. It is less money by month by year of service, so we have a chart I have, every single person that's affected. I put Steph Cronin on it, he is extremely good with the numbers. He has broken it down to every single person how much money they would lose. And I've got that on my desk for each person. Again, it only affects you if you elect to retire. Worst, worst case, we'll fix it next round of bargaining and then the big fight will be we want back pay for everybody affected because they can shove it up their ass as far as I'm concerned, that's OUR money. GM should be shaking your hand after 30 years and saying "Thanks for everything you've done. Look how we built our plant. We are number one in every metric and they go and screw us. This is a long way from a dead issue. I'm meeting with the company. We're having a leadership meeting next Monday in Toronto. This will definitely be brought up but eventually it's going to go to court. We have a Step 4 (grievance meeting) next week which is the final step before we go to arbitration. We're not rushing into this blind. We can fix it. We want to make sure our ducks are in a row. We will hire a lawyer from Unifor. Just because it's a big, big case and affects a lot of people so we want to get it done right.

Keith: Ok. I'm kind of skipping beats here. Recently the union released some information sheets that they wanted back about our workplace survey. I attribute this to the union realizing that we scored so poorly and the company basically come into the Union and saying "okay what do we need to do"? How is the response from the members and have we come up with any ideas or has anything grabbed any kind of traction?

Mike: I don't really wanna answer it yet and I don't want to put anyone off. We thought we'd get a lot of responses back extremely fast and we did. We got three back on Friday last week when I was off. We are getting three to five back every week right now so instead of just shutting them off as long as we still get a trickle of them coming in we are, um, I don't want to say scoring them. But we're going through to see a lot of the themes are common. Some of them are very interesting and of course if you asked 2500 people, what's important to one person to the next, it's quite a wide range of variety what people are bringing back. We're going to tally everything up and then we want to give a presentation to Gary Duff. I'm not holding my breath. I think the company we work for are extremely cheap and unless you bargain it they almost give you nothing.

That seems to be the way. It isn't even when you do bargain. They seem to want to take it back.

So if we do another podcast in a month, we'll hopefully have a lot more stuff to answer in that regard. But there are still trickling in. Gary Duff has asked me when we're coming to him with some of the stuff. He's interested in seeing it. But, as long as people keep bringing stuff in and they're very legitimate they're good ones. Some people write down one or two sentences. Some people have written us a short book on stuff they'd like to see which I totally understand. When Suzuki own 50 percent of us, I can list 20 things extremely quick that they did. Some of it was tokens and beads. They used to give pizza lunches, I was in the weld shop and every Friday was a pizza lunch for team leaders.

And then there was Christmas parties for the kids, Christmas parties for the adults.

We were actually working on some very good programs. We were working on one program that was fantastic. It actually got the green light. We are going to announce it to start in October and now the whole thing's been squashed and it sucks. But we did it. It was called an ambassador program they've done it and some of the plants GM gave us a green light. We were gonna get five vehicles everybody's name goes into a draw and every week five people would get a brand new GM vehicle for one week it was from a Wednesday to a Wednesday. There were pickup trucks, Cadillac, obviously an Equinox and every six months the vehicles got rotated. But every week five people got to take a vehicle for a week. GM now told us that program's dead. We are going to try and revive that program and get it going back here in January. That's our goal. Or in February. Because I do believe that's a good one.

Mike: It is a bit of a sore spot with me, even though I'm pissed off at GM, especially since our strike it's amazing how many people in the parking lot don't drive a GM which is how we get paid.

Mike: But we would like to get I'll say bums in the seats of some of these GM cars. Hopefully it leads to more sales and if it doesn't at least you get to drive a brand new car around for a week and maybe go on a trip somewhere for a weekend and see what you think of it.

Keith: I think the company can also help to get us driving an Equinox, by giving us better discounts on their products, maybe during payroll deductions towards the purchase of vehicles or things that can definitely make it easier. I think currently you might save three to five thousand off an Equinox. We build them. I honestly I believe we should get more of a deal on them at the end of the day. It's advertising for GM. It's free. So why wouldn't they do it.

Mike: And I'll be honest what else we've tried to come up with a bargaining and they just will not do it. I believe we should have a parts counter. I don't even want one of our members beyond. You can put a CAMI salary person behind. There should be a parts counter where you can go the damn parts for your vehicle at cost, at least anything we build. I'd like to be all GM vehicles but at least if you had an Equinox or whatever we're building you should be able to go right to a parts counter at the plant and you get it for Cost. If you need brakes you can go get the brakes. If you need tires you get tires. If that's not supporting your own plant, I don't know what is, and they just will not do it. I think it's totally ridiculous.

Keith: So you mentioned the leadership meeting with GM this weekend. What does that entail and who goes with you?

Mike: It would be every plant. So it's Oshawa, St. Catharines and us. It's not even the Woodstock plant. It's three plants that go. It's the plant chairs, the presidents and then the skilled trades chair at each location. So me, Joe Graves and Alex Balicki will go down there. This will be the third year. They want to do it annually. Oshawa is talking about boycotting it. They reached out to us for support. We have told him, "No, I want to go to it once a year." The president of GM Canada runs the meeting. He talks. The meeting lasts only about two hours. It's about an hour and a half of them doing presentations. There's lots of slides. There is obviously a lot of bullshit, but there's a lot of meat and potatoes there. Shows where GM is positioned. They don't go into heavy details about new product but they do talk different ideas that they have, different concepts that they have for Canada. And it just talks about GM as a whole. I believe if the president of GM Canada reaches out and wants to talk to us. I don't know how you don't go. We do have a list of questions that we go there with and ask him. A lot of it is extremely confidential. We understand that, but at least it shows us where our plant is looking for the future. Another good sign I believe for our plant

in that regard, too, is the apprenticeship program. They're going to be announced this month. Seven new apprentices are coming in and they've actually talked to us about starting seven more apprentices much earlier next year.

Mike: So they don't start apprentices and plants that they're closing. Obviously it changes people's lives because not only money-wise but you have a ticket and you have a job for life somewhere if not here. But they don't do that in plants that are closed and we were able to negotiate 25 more. Another one, talking about bumping them up higher and getting more in here quicker. So that's a good sign. But the meeting is next Monday. We'll drive there. It's only 2 hours. We are meeting ahead of time, probably for about two hours, just with us ourselves. Hopefully, Oshawa will be included. I know they're upset. They have every right to be upset. But I still think you take advantage when there's these meetings and you go and ask your questions. It's not the place to scream and yell; it's a place to take as much information as you possibly can and bring it back and see where you are.

Keith: And as we wrap up here, I just want to skip beats a little bit. Two weeks ago, our Local was involved in a donation to the Big Brothers & Big Sisters. We donated a surprise twenty-five thousand dollars on cupcakes that Local 88 member Denise Vyse made. As most of our members know those cupcakes are revered here in the plant. So it was a good price for those, although I don't think Denise expected it to go that high. Where did that money come from?

Mike: In the last round of bargaining we came up with a social justice fund. We were in the hotel for five extra weeks so really seven weeks total. We kept hearing a lot of stuff we tried to get back to the picket lines. We didn't get there a lot but we tried to get back to the picket lines quite a bit and we kept hearing stories. A lot of people were texting us showing us what the community had done how they responded. Whether it be food services or just taking the time, shaking their hands. I mean look at what the grocery store did. The local grocery store in town you came out three times a day loaded up all the coolers and never asked a penny for it. We had butcher shops. We had so many different people come to us. Mike Murphy and I were out for a drive one day to go see a couple people. And he said "we've got to do something for the community". And he actually came up with the idea. I said "yeah that's a good idea". And of course your mind's always going a hundred miles an hour back then. And Murph says to me "because I've actually thought of something" and he thought of a community justice fund. A social justice fund where we can give back to the community. So, we were able to bargain a one hundred thousand dollar Social Justice Fund. The company has to pay us a hundred thousand dollars a year. They give us the money and then it's up to us to decide how the money goes. But we put some specifics in there. And I'll just explain that again straight up to the members. How it's supposed to work is \$50,000 of that money stays locally into our normal funds. It's just a way to give our local some more money we give about \$80 to 90 thousand dollars away every year. Whether it be the Boy Scouts golf

tournaments, hockey (teams), United Way, all the different charities you name it. We (get requests) from members writing letters for donations etc. So we give about \$85 thousand dollars that's pretty close every year. \$50,000 of that will now be covered which gives our local fifty thousand dollars more to spend on other items.

Mike: Not everybody attends the membership meetings but we are looking at it getting rid of that house. It's become a money pit. And adding on a hall a decent sized regular office building. And then we get to do two \$25 thousand dollar donations a year. There are some rules around it, some of the rules we put in. So we're trying to get a big bang for our buck. The auction was my idea. We've come up with some other ideas. We're in the works of another one right now. We went to the membership months ago and said here's our plan. We are not going to go to the members and say we want to give \$25 thousand dollars to any specific group because we are trying to do it extremely secretive. We are trying to let people know about it in a different way to say "hey you know there's an event coming on maybe you want to go there". But we want a huge wow factor that gets the media attention, that brings our local into the spotlight which is what we are trying to do and let our presence get grown in this community. We did Tillsonburg and we have another one planned that will take place this winter. I don't want to give details out because we want the people to be in the audience that are totally 100% shocked.

Mike: We saw on Facebook they filmed the actual auction and we had almost 15,000 hits. That's the kind of response we want. I believe the next one we're going to give we will get 30 to 50 thousand hits because it's gonna be bigger, a lot more people in attendance and these are the kind of things that we are looking at. We want to do them in our communities where we live. We gave a \$25 thousand donation to Ingersoll. We thought we'd start in the town that we came from. Big Brothers Big Sisters is incorporating into Woodstock/Ingersoll/Tillsonburg and they do a lot of great work. So we gave them \$25 thousand. Our next one is gonna be local. We will be reaching out to different communities in Woodstock/London. The money is supposed to stay local. We are not asking our members, and I don't want people take it the wrong way. If we have twenty five hundred members and we ask them what charity is the most important to them. We're probably going to get fifteen hundred different responses and if we ask everybody what's their top three we're probably gonna get 15000 thousand different responses so we don't want to do that. We're trying to pick charities that hopefully everyone agrees with. This is a yearly annual fund so we will have four hundred thousand given to our local. Another thing I would like to point out is I don't believe for a minute that GM does near enough in our community to support a lot of our charities we embarrass them a couple times at some events we went too. We give an update in our plant yearly with city council in Ingersoll and it was embarrassing to sit there once and say that they have no money from GM whatsoever come in from the plant. We give two thousand dollars every month to the Fusion (Youth) Centre right off the bat to run the Fusion centre. That's a great local place that helps youth in our community.

A lot of our charity starts and ends with youth, especially close to home, Ingersoll. So we do give them \$2000 a month. So, we've kind of shamed GM. They have really stepped up to it, I'll admit. They've given a lot of money over the last couple of years. Nothing like we're trying to force them to give. So we give them (charities) money, it comes out of Local 88. It is our money. We decide where it goes, they (GM) have no say and then once it's paid they give us the cheque back to reimburse it. But we are very clear when we hand that money out that it comes from our members because it absolutely is a piece of our pie. It's cents on the dollar when you compare how many people there is to a hundred thousand dollars a year. If we can keep doing this every year in 10 years 20 years if there's another strike the community is going to back us big time because of the amount of money we give. We give the United Way a lot of money right now. We give United Way close to five hundred thousand dollars a year. So I'll be honest we're not looking to give them \$25 five thousand dollars anytime strictly because we give them half a million dollars every year in our opinion. It's never enough but that's already a huge amount.

We want people who are involved in the communities to understand how important our plant is, not just to our members but to our community by giving out huge donations here and there. The spotlight is not going to be about the plant chair or the president. We have our next event. We're not going to be in attendance. We are going to tap people on the shoulder. It's not about exposure for leadership, it's about exposure for the plant.

We are going to get different people to show up at some events, hand out the money. We are doing it extremely secretive, extremely quiet to being there. Then you can watch it on film. It's on Facebook, it's on our website.

It was unbelievable. And I'll tell you the feeling you get inside you the first time...

We went to the Big Brothers Big Sisters and sat with two (women from BBBS to let them know the plan). Joe Graves and I and Mike Murphy sat with them and told them here's we want to do. One lady started crying and then we had to bring the auctioneer in on it a few minutes before the auction because we didn't want the auctioneer to stop bidding halfway through and ask "Is this serious? What's going on? Is this is a joke?" He was in on it. He did a great job. He was so excited. It's not every day you get to sell a dozen cupcakes for \$25,000. So we wanted the cupcakes, they wanted a different item. We wanted Denise's because she's a CAMI member. She's a local person. I was actually at the same table with her she had absolutely no idea. That's part of the wow factor. It was absolutely fantastic! I think it was just great!

Keith: And I did speak to Denise after and yes she definitely was very shocked. I also spoke to a representative from Big Brothers Big Sisters to write the article. Also very excited, shocked completely enamored with our local. The amount of impact that that kind of money has is insane. I

know that the campaign was low on dollars this year so the timing was perfectly right. Big shout out to everyone involved.

Keith: Just want to wrap up here. Just some housekeeping things. The United Way campaign raffle prizes draw wraps up this week. Thursday/Friday is our last day. So if you see any members with the United Way Red bags make sure to grab them to get your raffle tickets. The draw for those prizes are on December 7th. Also currently we have the Christmas hamper program going on in the plant Salvation Army. That's the \$20 dollars buys a turkey. The canvassers are also taking loose change donations. That is today December 4th and tomorrow the 5th. So two days only. And usually those canvassers are decorated in some kind of crazy Christmas contraption. So by all means, be on the lookout for them.

Mike: Yeah. Just in closing. I really like this format. I like doing it. We're three weeks away from Christmas. They might not be the most politically correct thing to say but that's never bothered me in the past. But on behalf of myself, my family and all the inplant I do want to wish everybody a very Merry Christmas, all the best to everybody. And seeing a lot of things we see in our plant, all I wish for everybody next year is health. Soon, too many of our members don't make the finish line every year. We have five more members this year that didn't make it that were active in January that passed away. So nothing really means more than health. So to everybody out there Merry Christmas and nothing but health for you in 2019.

Keith: So, for Mike Van Boekel and Keith Ackworth, we thank you for listening/reading. If you have any questions or comments please feel free to email unifor88.ca@gmail.com

Thanks for listening/reading!