

Master Table Big Issue

atell June 12/73

Both Northern Electric Co. Ltd. and United Auto Workers have reiterated their willingness to continue negotiations, but largely on their own terms.

While UAW seeks master bargaining for membership at Northern plants at Belleville, London, Kingston and Bramalea, the company has independently announced the setting up of local meetings at these centres.

At a press conference late yesterday, UAW's chief negotiator, Bob Nickerson, said reason for his union's stand was to ensure wage parity between the different plants.

The job evaluation procedure at Northern sets up a points system. The same grade draws different wages at different plants under the contracts that expired February.

Mr. Nickerson said the union goal was to eliminate these differences. "What I think the company is saying is the differences are wages," he said. "If that's what they are saying then we're in trouble, big trouble, because our approach to this is that by the end of a three-year contract wages will be equal.

"No-one in the corporation ever compares work at one plant versus work at another plant when paying a rate of pay," said Mr. Nickerson. "All reference is to grades.

"The corporation has a job evaluation system and a grading system and they evaluate the jobs and place them within that grading system," he said. "How can they use their own evaluation system to pay a Grade 21 in Belleville 14 cents an hour less than a Grade 21 in London is getting.

"We have recognized differences — for example Kingston's seven-day week," said Mr. Nickerson.

He said that following statements made by plant presidents June 8 to the press saying the company would go back to the master table "if that was what it would take." UAW sent a telegram inviting the company to meet again at the master table at its own convenience.

"Then their industrial relations department sends us a letter saying 'sorry fella: we

are not meeting on a master basis', and calling it illegal," said Mr. Nickerson. He showed a letter dated June 5 from assistant vice-president of personnel, A. J. Cregan, that most bargaining agents received Friday.

"We reiterate our willingness to meet with the appropriate union representatives at the locale specified in the Certificate of Recognition," said the letter, the meaning of which was "local bargaining only." It said the union's condition of master bargaining was "in our opinion a clear infringement upon the Ontario Labor Relations Board's jurisdiction".

"Failure to accept this correspondence as notice of our desire to negotiate is, we believe, tantamount to failure to bargain in good faith on behalf of the members whom you have been accredited to represent," concluded the letter.

Mr. Nickerson said the reply to UAW's telegram had said the company would meet representatives at 10 a.m. today in London, on Wednesday at the Four Seasons in Belleville on Thursday at 10 a.m. in Toronto and Friday at 10 a.m. at Kingston. "If they think for one damn minute we're going to start all over again after a six weeks' strike

they're right out of their tree," he said.

If it came to the point where the company demanded a quick settlement or closure of the Belleville plant, Mr. Nickerson said his union's attitude would be "OK let's sit down and see what the problem is."

"If he (Belleville plant president, Dave Vice) is saying that the problem is centralized in Belleville — that the company can't pay the wages the union is asking for, why don't they come out and say it to us. We haven't been able to put our finger on the thing," said Mr. Nickerson.

"We've always said our position is a negotiable position, unlike theirs, so we can get this thing moving," he said. "In Kingston they've said it's a brand-new plant and we can't pay those employees that kind of money because they're not fully trained yet, but the employees at Belleville have been working a long time."

Mr. Nickerson denied company comments that master talks had earlier been devoted almost entirely to local issues with little time given to discussing the contract. "We began on April 23," he said. "There were no local issues talked at the table from the 23rd for two full weeks of solid bargaining."