

Live Bait & Ammo #27

Just when you think the UAW International can't sink any lower they take it down another notch. How do we exact accountability? Where's the checks and balances in this union?

The UAW Public Review Board [PRB] was formed for the purpose of insuring a continuation of high moral and ethical standards.....and to further strengthen the democratic processes and appeal procedures within the Union.... [UAW Constitution Art. 32 Sec. 1]

In 1999 the Public Review Board in case No. 1261 approved the censorship of a brother who accused the opposing caucus in a local union election of being company sympathizers. The PRB considered this label an attempt to vilify.

The PRB is out of touch with today's shop floor politics and the excremental secretions of a union enmeshed with corporate lackeys and non-elected union representation. In the new UAW, as Yokich likes to call it, some people actually run on a platform of cooperation with management and boast that they are pro company. The company sympathizers in turn accuse their rivals of being anti-company.

In one case the Rollover Caucus claimed that a vote for Dave Yettaw for local union president would incite GM to close the plant. Yettaw was defeated. The plant closed. So much for company sympathy.

While it may be said the PRB is out of touch with the reality of UAW politics, they do know who butters their bread and jams their buns.

In Case No. 1325, Local 2036 appealed the administratorship imposed on their Local by the UAW International Executive Board [IEB]. The International approved a strike by Local 2036 against Accuride and promised to stand by them for as long as it takes. The strikers were subsequently locked out. Eighteen months later the International cut off strike benefits.

In justification the IEB alleged that the local had failed or refused to perform its duties as a collective bargaining representative in a prudent or realistic way, awarding Accuride economic weapons to use against the membership, threatening economic failure, destruction of the Local, and decertification, and then, in a perverse fit of hypocrisy cited a need to restore democratic procedures, and otherwise enable the Local to adequately service its membership and meet its obligations. [IEB Minutes of the Show Cause Hearing 4/25/2000]

The distinguished professors of the PRB failed to see the irony. Whereas the International failed in its duties as a collective bargaining representative; whereas the International awarded Accuride economic weapons to use against the Local; whereas the International threatened members with financial ruin; whereas the International set the stage for decertification with deceit and betrayal; the preponderance of evidence shows the International demonstrated villainous, borderline criminal leadership.

The professors overlooked the devil in the details. Like adulterous lovers they ignored contradictions that might otherwise disrupt their sympathetic bliss.

The PRB conceded that the Local's conduct evidences neither corruption nor a threat to democratic procedures, but nonetheless decided in favor of the IEB because dispassionate heads may better be able to save what can be rescued from a frankly desperate situation. Desperate indeed. The choice to ratify a yellowdog contract or lose strike assistance amounted to extortion.

Too bad the dispassionate professor heads couldn't see the ruthless anti democratic IEB for what they are -- appointed International reps diametrically opposed to local union leaders elected directly by members. The professors likened the actions of the Local bargaining unit to suicide.

After the IEB cut off strike pay and medical insurance, members lost homes, cars, life savings; families were torn apart; one member did commit suicide. Too bad the PRB didn't exercise their high moral and ethical standards against the perps.

At the Show Cause Hearing in April 2000 President Yokich implied that the International would try to exert some leverage on Accuride off the record. One

year later the International insisted before the PRB, Genuine progress is being made.

Just the facts: the Local leadership presented a contract to the membership for ratification by secret ballot five times. From the beginning of the administratorship in May 2000 through October 2001, the International failed to negotiate even the hint of a tentative agreement.

The only thing the International achieved in that time frame is a manipulation of the Local's democratic process and the removal of Billy Robinson as Local Union president as per Accuride's off the record demand.

According to administrator Thurman, even the Company's attorney, who is associated with the fiercely anti-union Phelps Dodge Corporation, has told him that the Company still wants to get a contract. But the Local leadership was impeding this process... [PRB case No. 1325]

In sympathy with a notoriously anti-union attorney Thurman contends that Accuride's insistence on an open shop is irrelevant. In his eyes the only impediment is the members of Local 2036 who continue to picket in defense of a contract that respects union rights.

Deprived of strike pay and medical benefits, Billy Robinson was forced into early retirement as the only means of securing income. According to the UAW Constitution a retired member can vote or run for non-bargaining local union positions.

The membership nominated Billy for president and he accepted. Then the International stepped in. The administrator, Terry Thurman, sent a special delivery letter to the Local dictating that only active members could vote or be nominated.

John Lyons, the chair of the election committee, told Thurman in that case they should redo the nominations. Thurman refused to facilitate a dignified resolution. John explained that the members would have nominated others for president if they knew Billy was not eligible. But Thurman had no interest in respecting members' rights or honoring the UAW Constitution.

Thurman insisted on taking control of the election. He demanded the Local use the ballots he designed and printed, and sent four International Reps to domineer the election. Members had no choice. There was only one candidate for president. (No criticism of current president, Bill Priest, intended. I only wish to illustrate the obstruction of the Local's democratic process by the International.)

174 members, a majority of eligible voters, signed a petition in protest of the election.

They cite the following facts:

- 1) members were not duly notified of the time of the election;
- 2) they were not informed that Billy Robinson's name would be removed from the ballot until two days before the election;
- 3) only members drawing strike benefits were allowed to vote, thus excluding some members in good standing who walk the picketline and are eligible for recall;
- 4) the presence of four International Reps created a hostile atmosphere. A dozen people wrote letters attesting they felt intimidated, feared the presence of the International Reps would mean trouble, perhaps violence, and decided to leave without voting.

The PRB accused Local 2036 leadership of being stubborn, self destructive, and irresponsible, and portrayed the efforts of the IEB as a last ditch effort to rescue Local 2036. What efforts has the IEB made?

Richard Ruppert, an assistant to Shoemaker answered my query: At the national level we continue to pressure General Motors and other car makers to do business with suppliers who respect their workers rights to organize and bargain collectively. Pleas for corporate sympathy appear to be the only strategy. Ah, but I vilify. Well, so be it.

The IEB had reinstated strike benefits after Local 2036 laundered their dirty treachery in the open air court of public opinion. After the bastardized election, the IEB cut the strike pay in half and on November 1, the International instructed the Local 2036 leadership to schedule a ratification vote on November 3. Local President, Bill Priest, protested that such short notice wasn't in compliance with Local By-Laws. The International didn't care.

The proposed agreement was no different than the previous company proposal they had rejected five times. Contrary to assertions made by the International to the Public Review Board, no progress had been made in negotiations with Accuride. The agreement would effectively institute the open shop and nullify seniority. Less than one fourth of eligible workers would be recalled.

Hold your sympathy, folks. The members of Local 2036 want plain truth and simple justice, not sop.

The contract was trounced by a resounding 97% margin. Not what the IEB wanted. The following week the IEB announced that all strike benefits would cease on January 15, 2002. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, God Bless America, and Solidarity Forever.

After 17 months of posturing for corporate sympathy, the International admitted to officials of Local 2036, Ford and the other truck manufacturers could not make an impression on Accuride and we are tired of putting out money."

Thus UAW members will continue to mount scab wheels on trucks made in America.

President-select, Ron Gettlefinger, says Organizing is the top priority, but he doesn't have a clue how to go about it, other than asking the Big Three for help.

Bill Priest said the Local would hold one more ratification vote, and Thurman said if it wasn't ratified the IEB would pull their charter. I don't want to vilify, I want to piss on his grave.

Woody Guthrie once said, Some people rob you with a fountain pen. I say, sometimes villains wear union hats, jackals wear suits, scoundrels don flags, morons sport diplomas, and turncoats hide behind a sinister cloak of authority.

One small local in Henderson, Kentucky has been on the picket line for 45 months. They have faithfully maintained solidarity and stood their ground in a manner that should make all UAW members proud.

For their valiant efforts and sacrifice, they have been attacked by robbers, villains, jackals, scoundrels, morons, scabs, and turncoats.

They are still standing strong. The standard of measure for integrity is not success or failure, it's the moral choice one makes in the face of insurmountable odds.

The members of Local 2036 have shown us all what solidarity, perseverance, and the courage of conviction means. Their struggle will be the standard of measure for a long time to come.

We haven't heard the last verse from Local 2036 but the refrain is as old as rebellion in America and when the whistle finally blows the sound will echo like a freight train barreling through the Cumberland Gap.

UAW Local 2151

The following pledge was adapted from the Solidarity Committee at Ford/UAW Local 879 in St. Paul, Mn.

Mail signed copies to:

Henderson Workers Solidarity Fund,
c/o Billy Robinson,
PO Box 248
Sebree, Ky 42455

Solidarity Pledge

Auto companies exert enormous pressure on us to compete against each other in a dog eat dog contest that can only result in cutting our jobs and closing our plants.

We are at a crossroad. We feel urged to abandon Friendship, Solidarity, and Unionism, in order to compete with one another.

I reject this selfish, anti-union path, and choose instead to walk the walk with my Union Brothers and Sisters.

I believe in the Union. I choose to stand shoulder to shoulder with my Union Brothers and Sisters everywhere.

I believe that if every autoworker supports every other autoworker, we can build a Solidarity Movement to protect every autoworker by fighting for each and every job.

I will support my coworkers every day on the job. That is what Solidarity is all about.

I will do whatever I can to extend Solidarity throughout our plant and between our plants to help keep every plant open. If plants should close or shifts be cut, I am willing to refuse to work voluntary overtime and to demand that all of us return to work when business picks up again.

To this end, I support the UAW's original demand to shorten our work week to 32 hours of work for 40 hours of pay.

I pledge my self to back the principled, democratic action of fellow workers everywhere to revive and extend Solidarity in every place we work, union and nonunion.

I refuse to aid and abet scab labor.

I will resist competition with my Union Brothers and Sisters.

I pledge my self to Solidarity in the memory of all the victims and heroes of labor struggles who came before me.

Name.....

Local Union _____

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

8) _____

9) _____

10) _____