

Live Bait & Ammo # 55

In all the years I've been writing Live Bait & Ammo neither the Local nor the International has tried to repress my rights..... until now. Since the rank and file meeting at Local 1231 was announced, I've been subjected to anonymous threats and veiled intimidation.

What are they afraid of?

I've attended and helped organize lots of unofficial rank and file meetings around the midwest. I even picketed Solidarity House on behalf of Local 2036 members who went on strike under orders from Regional Director Ron Gettelfinger, were subsequently locked out, and then had their strike benefits abruptly stripped away.

Last I checked American citizens still had the right to free speech and assembly. Last I checked the UAW Ethical Practices Codes stated: "The UAW is proud of its democratic heritage." If the voice of opposition is gagged, there is no democracy. If there is no democracy, there is no genuine solidarity, and hence, no union. I understand that some so called union members are upset that fellow workers are willing to exercise their right to free speech and assembly. It's always easy to spot a fascist, they worship authority and abhor independence.

A fascist is someone who thinks only "Authority" should be allowed to express opinion or speak publicly. A fascist believes everyone should fall in line behind the leader-god and march in lock step. They try to intimidate anyone who doesn't agree with them. They cloak themselves in the flag or the banner of solidarity, but they are neither patriots nor unionists. A true patriot supports democracy and free speech. A true unionist believes we are all leaders and the people are the highest authority. A true unionist would never threaten a fellow worker for speaking their mind, anywhere, anytime. Fascists try to suppress free speech because they don't have thoughts of their own. They kowtow to authority and take pride in bootlicking. The best way to resist repression and assert your rights is to show up at the meeting on November 6, at UAW Local 1231, 4629 Alpine. N.W., Comstock Park, MI. 49321. Let the International Union know you are not intimidated. We, the members, have the power. That's what they are afraid of.

As a result of my activities I have been asked to resign my position as Guide on the Local Executive Board. The Oath of Office on page 116 of the UAW Constitution states: "I trust you will all faithfully perform your duties so that you may gain not only the esteem of your brothers and sisters, but what is of even more importance, the approval of your conscience."

If one's conscience must be subjected to "official" approval, the dictatorship of the proletariat has succeeded. I concur with Mark Twain who once said, "Loyalty to the people always. Loyalty to officials when they deserve it."

I am not prone to walk away from a fight but out of regard for the Local I will resign. I do not believe it would be appropriate to subject the Local to the financial expense, or the political fracture that a recall campaign would entail. I believe those issues can be better handled next spring during elections. I have always been open, straightforward, and above board. The membership knew who I was and what I stood for when they elected me. I didn't deceive anyone.

A Guide is a sort of watch dog on the E-Board. Now the membership has the opportunity to select a new Guide. One that doesn't bark. A cucumber so cool there's mildew on his brow.

I bear no animosity toward our Local President. I know where this shit comes from. But I must take issue with the accusation that I am "immoral and unethical".

At the Bargaining Convention in March 1999 I addressed the Convention. Shoemaker was the Chair. I said directly to him, "Tell us the truth now. End the silence. Give us the information we need to make the best decisions for ourselves and our families." Shoemaker didn't respond. [Special Convention Proceedings, 1999, Page 103]

In response to my friend Dean Braid's question about Delphi, Yokich told the Convention, "I told GM that they have to keep 51 percent of the stock. That way it does not give a spin off. Actually what it does, it just gives half the IPO and they're still part of the GM system." [Special Convention Proceedings, 1999, page 197].

Should we trust such "officials"? Anyone who asserts that deceivers are trustworthy and those who speak truth to power are unethical has lost his moral bearings.

At the Constitutional Convention in 1998 Yokich said of the CAT strike, "Don't let anyone tell you we didn't win that. Goddamnit!"

The fact is, the UAW rolled over on 441 unfair labor practice charges. Shoemaker proposed a contract which would have abandoned 50 members who were fired for union activity. The members shot it down. Shoemaker made all the scabs union members. They were not required to pay back dues which would have amounted to \$1.8 million, but the International demanded that Local 751 pay \$1 million in back dues which it had spent on solidarity activities during the strikes. When Local 751 couldn't pay the International put them into receivership. [Notes from an interview with UAW Local 751 President Larry Solomon by Caroline Lund]

A reporter asked me: "In Live Bait and Ammo #10 you warned retirees, 'What's to prevent GM from slashing your benefits?' How did you know that back then?" Credit where credit is due. I studied the New Directions Movement which accurately predicted the destructiveness of union management collaboration. Credibility where credibility is due.

Here are some excerpts from Live Bait & Ammo #10 which I wrote on my way to the Bargaining Convention in March 1999.

The big question on every one's mind is what will the UAW do and why haven't we heard anything? We have a right to know. It's our business. No one at Solidarity House will lose their job or their pension as a result of this corporate shell game....

Only union members on the shop floor will pay the price. Only union members on the shop floor will be dislocated, pressured into early retirements, forced to accept concessions....

We got the news. It's bad. We're waiting for a response from the UAW. The cold silence coming out of Solidarity House is ominous....

We can't depend on corporate or union leaders for security. When leaders are ethically but not legally obligated, they will take advantage of you for their own selfish ends. Then, they will demean and disrespect you in order to justify their behavior and suppress their guilt.....

Brothers and Sisters, you can retire now, get out while the gettin's good, I can't blame you, but I have to ask, what's to prevent GM from slashing your benefits.....

As I drove to Detroit I felt angry. Angry at the silence of the International UAW.....

My Local Union is being torn apart by the Delphi spin-off and no one in Solidarity House seems to care.....

The similarities are eerie, but the stakes are higher now. We deserve the truth so we can make the best decisions for ourselves and our families.

I have asked repeatedly to see a copy of the Benefit Guarantee that was promised us in the 1999 Highlights since last June. The only copy I have seen thus far was neither signed nor dated. It wasn't even on official letterhead. It was not a legally binding document, it didn't even have the whiff of a handshake. We have a legal right to see pertinent contractual documents.

Who is unethical? Who is being protected? Who is being represented?

Gettelfinger said he would not open the contract with GM to alter health care benefits and that GM could not legally change retirement benefits. Then Gettelfinger opened the contract and assisted GM in changing health care benefits for retirees. What GM could not legally do themselves, Gettelfinger did for them. Then the UAW filed a lawsuit against GM in order to have the court recognize the UAW as the legal representatives of the GM retirees and thus render the possibility of retirees filing their own class action lawsuit null and void.

Ethics are important. Honesty is important. Truth is essential.

My word is my bond. I resign. As Tom Paine once said, "Let them call me rebel and welcome, I feel no concern from it; but I should suffer the misery of devils, were I to make a whore of my soul..."

In Constant Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151

|| www.uawndm.org || www.futureoftheunion.com