

Live Bait & Ammo #28

In Accuride's final contract offer to UAW Local 2036 in Henderson, Ky they informed the membership that management would not honor seniority. If the members of Local 2036 ratified the contract, Accuride would pick and choose who they wanted to recall. They even went so far as to provide a list.

No union officers were included on the recall list. Furthermore, a steward would not be called out during working hours unless the supervisor deemed it necessary. Union problems could only be discussed after work, on your own time, and off company property. It wasn't a contract, it was a prescription for union busting.

According to minutes of the November meeting of the UAW International Executive Board, Region 3 Director, Terry Thurman, recommended to the Board, As of January 15, 2002, if no contract has been reached, then the strike will be terminated and benefits will stop. It is also possible that the local union charter may be revoked after January 15, 2002 if no settlement is reached. Upon motion duly made and supported, the IEB approved Brother Thurman's recommendation.

On January 13, UAW Solidarity Coalition members picketed the Auto Show at Cobo Hall and passed out leaflets describing the betrayal of Local 2036 by the UAW International. On January 14, activists picketed Solidarity House; the Ford truck plant in Louisville, KY, the GM truck plant in Janesville, WI; and Region 1-D offices in Grand Rapids, MI.

Solidarity House in Detroit was relatively quiet. All the UAW VPs were in Palm Springs hobnobbing with bosses from the Big Three. People who work at Solidarity House are members of OPEIU and they have little regard for UAW International reps.

As cars passed through the picket line Jan Austin from Local 594 collected \$355 in donations. She gave them buttons saying Don't Be Next - Support Local 2036, but some of them asked for picket signs as souvenirs. The most popular were: Company/Union Whores Apply Within and End Golf Cart Unionism.

Out on the street the signs were less humorous. They denounced betrayal and proclaimed Don't Be Next; An Injury to One is an Injury to All; Solidarity is Forever not for Awhile; The Strike Fund is for Strikers not Porkchoppers; Don't Deep Six Local 2036; & Which Side are You On?.

Former Detroit newspaper strikers walked the line, as did workers from Mexican Industries, and members of New Directions, the UAW Solidarity Coalition, and UAW Concern. Doug Hanscom came from Baltimore, MD, Caroline Lund came from Nummi, CA, and CAW member, Diane Albrecht, came from Stratford, Ontario.

Two workers from West Virginia told me they had been temp workers for five years. As temps they did not receive benefits or full pay though they did equal work. They were required to pay union dues, but they could not file a grievance. In a perverted twist of union democracy they were allowed to vote for the union rep who would not represent them. And the UAW wonders why they can't win organizing drives?

Billy Robinson and I requested an audience with an International VP. We were permitted inside the lobby while security guards made phone calls upstairs. After more than twenty years of paying dues we are still treated like illegal aliens at Solidarity House. Since the VPs were all in Palm Springs we had to content ourselves with an administrative assistant of Elizabeth Bunn who, they said, was Vice President in charge of Independent Parts Suppliers.

The a.a. mumbled introductions. When he shook my hand, I did a double take. I thought he handed me a fish. I didn't catch his name but his gold bracelet was initialed J.R.

He led us into a small room in the lobby constructed with clear Plexiglas walls. I felt like I was in an aquarium. The security guards stared at us through the glass and we stared back. They never blinked. I wondered if they were robots, but they were too fat, and appeared to be sucking air.

We sat down at a table and JR proceeded to take notes. JR was real slow. There were long pauses between his words, not like he was choosing his words carefully, but like he couldn't find them. The conversation reminded me of internet chat. You

know how you wait so long for the response your mind wanders off, and before you know it, you inadvertently change the subject, and after that the conversation stumbles like two drunks in a Who's on first? routine.

JR didn't know anything about the lockout at Local 2036 in Henderson, KY. He was the administrative assistant to a UAW V.P. in charge of Independent Parts Suppliers and he didn't know anything about a lockout that was nearly four years old. That or he thought playing dumb was smart.

Billy looked tired. He was recovering from knee surgery. The past year had been especially hard. Two of his siblings had passed away, another was seriously ill, a few members of Local 2036 had committed suicide after the International cut off strike benefits back in 1999, lots of families had been torn up. Like others at local 2036 his hope for retirement had been snuffed.

Billy was patient. He started at the beginning. He spoke slowly, giving JR plenty of time to write it all down. I had to admire Billy as I listened to the tale. JR was a ringer, but Billy treated him respectfully, and spoke articulately, noting all the pertinent details accurately.

The characteristic I admire most is perseverance, the strength to keep coming back, to never give up. It makes all the difference, and Billy like so many others from his local has perseverance to spare. A. Philip Randolph introduced a resolution to refuse certification to unions that denied membership to African-Americans at every AFL convention from 1933 until it became federal law in 1964. Thirty-one years of no justice, no peace.

Randolph is the man who organized the civil rights march on Washington DC at which Martin Luther King gave his famous I Have a Dream speech. Because of Randolph's tenacity we have that vision implanted in our memories. As I listened to Billy speak I understood why the International is afraid of him. He speaks from the heart. And he won't go away.

Billy said, We feel betrayed. He said, We believe in the union. He said. This strike could have been won 46 months ago and it still could be won. He said, We want the International to support us in our struggle for justice.

Billy wound the interview up by requesting that Elizabeth Bunn answer four questions:

1) Why didn't the International ever support us in our strike/lockout?

2) Why did they cut off our strike benefits?

3) How do they expect to organize in the South after they betrayed us like that? What should we tell our fellow workers in Kentucky? Join the UAW, they'll never stab you in the back?

4) Is Elizabeth Bunn and the rest of the IEB aware that some members of Local 2036 who have medical problems will die as a result of their decision to discontinue health insurance for locked out workers?

JR wrote the questions down. We stared into the blankness of his eyes. He didn't have anything to say, and I doubt Bunn will either.

Silence is worth a thousand words, picture perfect and crystal clear. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Where do we, as activists who care about unions, go from here?

Billy and I returned to the street and rejoined the soldiers of solidarity. It felt good to be back in the company of our brothers and sisters. As Miguel Chavarria said, The real leaders are out here in the street.

Solidarity Now,

UAW Local 2151