

Live Bait & Ammo #19

All union members in the Independent Parts Supply sector of the auto industry, and that now includes Delphi, Visteon, and American Axle (Powertrain, you're next) need to pay attention to events at Local 2036 in Henderson, Kentucky. Transcripts show that at a special meeting of the UAW International Executive Board Yokich told Billy Robinson, president of Local 2036, You're not the first plant that lost their strike benefits. You're far from the first plant.

This is surprising news to members in the Big Three but evidently not in IPS where union members are more isolated and their plight less publicized. Gettlefinger authorized the strike at Accuride but he failed to tell union members that at the International solidarity is not forever, it's only for a while, and depends on which way the wind blows.

This practice contrasts sharply with the dog and pony show at the Constitutional Convention in '98 where members of HERE in an emotionally charged display were lauded for maintaining a picket line outside the Frontier Hotel for six years, four months, and ten days. John Wilhelm, president of HERE, in his speech to the convention said, And I think that you can understand what it takes for a local union leader for six years, four months, and ten days to insist that every resource the union had or could find be at the disposal of those strikers, including \$26 million. That's a tough local union leader, and without him the strike couldn't have been won.

The IEB abandoned Local 2036 after 18 months. The richest union in the country cut off strike benefits at \$4.5 million and then imposed administratorship on the Local because Billy Robinson, a tough local union leader, and his loyal members wouldn't roll over and play patsy.

Wilhelm said of the hotel and restaurant strikers in Las Vegas, These strikers could not have won this strike, could not have persevered so long without the UAW's steadfast support.

Steadfast support that was not available for UAW members of Local 2036. Perhaps because there's no casino in Henderson. Wilhelm went on to say, You were with

these courageous strikers every time you came to Las Vegas for meetings and conferences. You were there financially every Christmas for the strikers and their kids....Without that steadfast support, President Yokich, there is no way that strike could have been won.

No International Rep ever showed up at the picket line in Henderson, Kentucky and by the time the second Christmas rolled around the locked out members of Local 2036 received no Christmas donations from the UAW whatsoever. Not even a turkey neck for their courage and perseverance.

HERE, members presented Yokich with a plaque that said, One Day Longer. Perhaps we should present Yokich with a plaque that reads: Least Trustworthy President in UAW History.

Regional Director Terry Thurman opened the Show Cause Hearing by accusing Local 2036 officers of repeatedly refusing to take back the proposal for.... a ratification vote to the membership. We're all familiar with the double-shuffle routine. When the International feels a Local hasn't voted right they make them vote again until they get it right.

We'd be hard put to find an example of a more profound disrespect for democracy and the will of the people. The fact is the membership rejected ratification five times in secret ballot votes under the watchful eye of International Rep, Bob Boone. And after learning that strike benefits had been yanked without warning or reason, the membership courageously voted by secret ballot not to vote again on ratification without significant changes in the proposal.

Before ratification votes Accuride sent letters to more than half the members warning them they would not get their jobs back even if they accepted the company's terms. Thereby sabotaging any hopes of ratification and revealing the company's intention to get rid of the UAW. Thurman conveniently ignored this item in his report. He had more important concerns. He denounced officers of Local 2036 for not acting under the dictates of common sense. They are causing us problems in several Regions throughout the country. We have received e-mails that they have put out over the internet. Bad press not the plight of a membership struggling to survive upset Thurman.

It is evident from transcripts of the meeting the IEB knew nothing about the predicament of Local 2036. Gettlefinger wondered, What date was it that the unconditional offer vote was taken? On 3/31/98 Local 2036 voted by yet another secret ballot to return to work unconditionally. Accuride announced the lockout before the vote was tabulated.

Gettlefinger was informed of events by phone twice that day. Apparently it slipped his mind. Just because he authorized the strike doesn't mean we can expect him to pay attention to the results, or act accountable. Yokich said, I don't know who you make wheels for, but obviously we'll know before you leave today. More than two years after a lockout the president of the International admits he didn't even know who they supplied wheels to? Hell, I knew they supplied Ford, GM, Mack, Peterbilt, Navistar, Freightliner, among others, and I'm a machine operator in Coopersville.

Yokich made this admission after saying, When we see a hopeless situation, usually the Secretary-Treasurer and the Regional Director make a recommendation to the Board, and we talk about it. We don't just do it.

Well what the hell did they talk about and why didn't they discuss it with the Local Union before they made the decision to cut off strike benefits? Why didn't they confer directly with Local Union officers until, as Rubin Burks pointed out, We have seen a number of fliers and newspaper articles coming out of your local...We view that as a situation that is chaotic, that is causing some problems not only with your local but with the Union as a whole... He wanted to know what Billy could do about it.

He elaborated, I've seen it on the handbills; I've seen it on the web site. I've seen all that, where we're accused of this or that, or Steve Yokich is accused of this or that. Obviously without the handbills, web sites, fliers, and 'this-or-thats' the IEB wouldn't have spit in the direction of Kentucky. The truly hopeless situation is the ignorance and incompetence of the IEB.

Billy Robinson responded: I'm 55 years old and ever since I've been 16 years old I've been a union member, period. I adamantly believe in organized labor. Everybody in that part of the country has heard me for years proclaiming the UAW to be the greatest union there ever was. I still believe that.

We are totally upset because we lost our strike benefits and were given no reason. The only thing that was presented to us as a reason was that it's time for us to get on with our lives. We don't feel that way. We feel that we can win this fight, but the UAW International has to help us. They have to give us the right to do an organizing campaign that would have teeth in it. They have to bring their might to bear on the people who use these wheels, these scab produced wheels. We feel that is what has to happen. We think the fight can be won.

Yokich didn't get the groveling he wanted. He was pissed. He retorted, You can put all the leaflets out and it doesn't bother me a bit, because I know what this Union can do and I know what we've been doing, and I know how to do it. He [Burks] threw you a homerun ball, quite frankly. I'd have thrown you a fast ball inside. This remark from the most famous junk ball pitcher in union history.

Yokich expounded, It's not about the money. It has nothing to do with the money. What it really has to do with is: Is that membership getting proper representation? Do they understand their rights? Do they come to the meetings and understand, or have they been coached into the meetings?

Union members understood when Regional Director Terry Thurman said at a meeting in Louisville, We'll be with you on this picket line as long as it takes. And now they understand Thurman is full of shit. Now they understand perfectly well that they did not get proper representation from Thurman, Gettlefinger, or any of the other members of the Rollover Caucus.

Burks had the audacity to tell Billy Robinson, one of our most steadfast and competent local union presidents, The membership wants leadership. They want it from you, they want it from me, they want it from everybody. That's what they depend upon -- leadership. As you know sometimes leadership is very difficult, I understand. But you have to stand up in the face of reality and say: 'Look, this is where it's at.'

Damn right we want leadership. We want leaders we can depend on to follow through on commitments. We want leaders who know what products we make, who we supply, and exactly what sort of pressure we are under from the corporations. We want leaders who aren't surprised when GM spins off Delphi.

We want leaders who spend less time on the golf course and more time rubbing elbows with workers on the shop floor. We want leaders who are informed, knowledgeable, and competent. We haven't seen evidence of leadership in the Rollover Caucus in years. All we've seen is cronyism, capitulation, and a complete lack of strategic planning.

Each year more UAW work is lost, not to foreign countries as Yokich would have us believe, but to non-union IPS plants. Now as Accuride threatens to bust an IPS local, Yokich throws in the towel. No bang for that buck, barely a whimper. But after all, no one on the IEB ever misses a paycheck, or a tee time.

For the record Yokich said he would initiate some line of action at the International level to pressure Accuride which he said, We won't put on the record. According to transcripts Yokich said to Billy Robinson, Come May, the first week in May, we'll see if some of this action has worked, on our side. Okay? If it hasn't, then we're going to take a hard look at it at the May Board meeting, how we're going to do this. Obviously, we'll keep you informed as we go along.

So here it is August and the only thing the IEB has done is impose administratorship on Local 2036, confiscate their Local Union funds, and reportedly bounce checks. According to Billy Robinson no one from the International has communicated with him or any other member of Local 2036 at all. That's not leadership, it's tyranny.

Local 2036 appealed to the Public Review Board because the Show Cause Hearing failed to show evidence of any wrong doing on the part of Local Union officers or members. Regional Director Terry Thurman's false accusations and disinformation were refuted by documentation presented by the officers of Local 2036. But evidence is superfluous in a Kangaroo Court. The goal of the Show Cause Hearing wasn't truth or justice, it was vengeance and intimidation. The bureaucrats found the workers guilty of a gross lack of subservience to the IEB's capricious authority.

In Yokich's written response to the PRB he said, The Board must keep in mind, however, that the members of the IEB are elected [his italics] as labor leaders, in large part because of their bargaining ability.

What a laugh. First of all, everyone in the International rose above the ranks by appointment. Patronage, not democracy, is the name of the game. Secondly, none of the IEB were elected by one member one vote. They were acclaimed in sham elections by delegates who had no other choice. We didn't even get to choose between the lesser of two evils. Finally, the only bargaining ability Yokich and his Rollover Team have shown is the ability to bargain away UAW members' jobs.

Yokich went on to say, Democracy frequently judges its leadership by what occurs 'On his or her Watch'. It is fundamentally undemocratic [his italics] to tax the UAW's leadership for these concerns about how these events might reflect on their leadership. The UAW's leadership, at all levels is supposed to [his italics] worry about looking like they are not protecting the membership. Here the IEB stepped up to those responsibilities. Their vehicle was the administratorship.

Is that or is that not the most pitiful exposition of leadership you have ever heard from a union president? Yokich is so ungainly crooked he lies in italics.

In his response to the PRB Yokich conceded that there was a strategic distance between the IEB and Local 2036 roughly comparable to that between the Code of Bushido and the principles of General Eisenhower. I know, I know, you're wondering where he comes up with all this bullshit. Allow me to explain.

The Code of Bushido is the ethical code of Samurai Warriors. The Samurai understand that real power derives not from war but rather The Way of the Warrior: his dignity, his virtue, his character. The seven virtues Samurai warriors were encouraged to emulate in the Code of Bushido are: justice, courage, kindness, politeness, truthfulness, honor, and loyalty.

I think it's safe to say that Yokich doesn't fall under the rubric of Bushido, so I assume he aligns himself with General Eisenhower. In the muddle of his shallow mind the leaders of Local 2036 may have all the virtues of Bushido and it doesn't matter because he has the Atomic Bomb. We know different.

Yokich delivers no more lethal bang than a fart in a paper bag. From the debacle at CAT, to the farce in Flint, to the sell out of Delphi, over and over the refrain is the same: Yokich is a loser. The membership didn't rollover, the leadership rolled over. The history of Yokich's tenure at the helm of the UAW is an indisputably dismal and

deplorable flop. And he has accomplished this pratfall in an era of unprecedented economic expansion and increased productivity. UAW leadership has hit bottom. We can only go up from here.

I believe the only way up and out of this morass of leadership is for union members to stop expecting leadership from the likes of Yokich, Burks, Gettlefinger, and Shoemaker. We have to look for solidarity and support and genuine leadership from real autoworkers on the shop floor.

The bureaucrats at Solidarity House are more interested in turning our UAW education center at Black Lake into a country club than fighting for jobs and the dignity of working people. If we reject wheels made by scabs we can win this labor dispute.

It's time to side with the real working class warriors in this battle against corporations and their puppets in the IEB. Send a pledge of solidarity to:

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

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151