

Live Bait & Ammo #38

On the final day of the UAW Constitutional Convention in June 2002 the Administration Caucus passed a constitutional amendment to dissolve Region 2 in retaliation for Warren Davis's decision to run for reelection as Director of Region 2.

Ad. Caucus meetings held that morning in preparation for the surprise amendment delayed the convention proceedings for over an hour. Davis was slandered and vilified in these impromptu meetings of selected delegates.

Davis was not permitted to address the convention or otherwise defend his position. What didn't the Ad. Caucus want us to hear?

Davis's decision to defy the Ad. Caucus rule against members over 65 was a surprise, but apparently a welcomed one. Three times during Davis's and Vadovski's statements to the assembled delegates of Region 2, the unanticipated decision was roundly cheered. Davis was elected by acclamation. Delegates spontaneously began a collection for Davis's congressional campaign immediately following the election. Davis tried to discourage it out of concern for legality, but \$1839 was collected despite his protest. Delegates of Region 2 left the meeting satisfied with the outcome of their vote.

The following morning the Ad. Caucus distributed a three page flyer denouncing Warren Davis. The Constitutional Committee obediently reported the amendment to dissolve Region 2.

Warren Davis was not allowed to address the convention. When Davis attempted to gain recognition by the Chair in order to explain his decision and counter his critics, he was escorted offstage by Yokich's Ad. Asst., and personal body guards. The Ad. Caucus didn't want us to hear what Davis had to say. We deserve to hear both sides.

In a statement to the press Davis said in part: The UAW leadership caucus's mandatory retirement policy is archaic and flagrantly discriminatory. It has no place in a progressive union, which should champion the cause of ending employment barriers based on arbitrary age criteria. The union should set an

example in this regard, not defend a rule that bars members 65 and older from running for International office.

No one can imagine a union leadership in this day and age stating publicly, 'We have not had women in our leadership body, and we intend to keep it that way because we think their exclusion works well.' Nor can anyone imagine a union leadership today stating publicly, 'We have not had African Americans in our leadership body and we intend to keep it that way because we think their exclusion works well.' Either of these statements are so outrageously reactionary, reprehensible, and contrary to everything that the union movement stands for that anyone voicing them would be repudiated and denounced by union members and the public as a whole.

Yet here we have the Administration Caucus saying, in effect, 'We have not permitted members over 65 years of age to be elected to our leadership body and we intend to keep it that way because we think their exclusion works well.' Such thinking reflects a Stone Age mentality and has no legitimate place in today's world.

My election was certified and no questions have been raised concerning its integrity or legality. Leaving aside all personal attacks against me, the UAW Administration Caucus has a question they should answer. How can they defend a rule that so clearly violates the idea that age, by itself, should never be a criteria for leadership?

I have long been aware of the mandatory retirement rule. I never liked it and I never voted for it, but no one that I know who reached the age of ineligibility challenged it. I decided to do so.

I'm fully aware of the value of bringing younger workers into the union leadership. I also believe that there is an essential role to be played by older and experienced trade unionists in the leadership. There has to be the proper balance and mix between the two groups. Who is to decide what that is? I say it is the responsibility of the delegates, not top leaders acting autocratically and irresponsibly by vetoing what the delegates have democratically decided. It is not easy to be in a fight against the leadership of a union with whom I served for so many years, but it is a fight that has to be waged.

I heard Ad. Caucus followers say that Davis had always been a snake, disloyal, and untrustworthy. But none of the delegates who I heard defame his character were from Region 2 or had any personal experience with Warren Davis. Ad Caucus followers were merely parroting the slander of the ruling party. Why was Davis a pariah on the UAW International Executive Board?

Upon investigation I learned that Davis had opposed the Saturn agreement which broke the pattern contract and established a local union dominated by appointees rather than elected representatives.

In 1984 he presented a position paper to the UAW International Executive Board denouncing the Quality of Work Life program as a tactic to undermine the Union. He stated in part: QWL is a sophisticated management control strategy which aims to make workers police themselves and each other on management's behalf. If workers can be brought to identify with management's productivity goals, they will bring pressure to bear against the less productive workers and against militants who resist speed-up. Greater worker identification with production, and the company's improved access to worker's job knowledge, will make management less vulnerable to slow downs or any power of the worker to resist management pressure on the job.

QWL divides our membership. It creates a group of employees who are treated like a privileged class within the bargaining unit. It provides easy access to those whose main ambition is to get management jobs to call themselves to the attention of management. It even gives the member who is bucking for foreman a legitimate avenue for reporting on his fellow workers.

Davis's position against cooperative programs is a fundamental conflict with the Ad. Caucus. He did not believe that neutrality agreements in regards to organizing drives could be had without a price. He made it clear that he believed partnerships between union and management involved a dangerous compromise.

In 1998 Davis spearheaded a campaign to improve Workers Compensation laws in the state of Ohio. The most egregious Workers Comp bill ever passed by the Ohio legislature was overturned. More than 400,000 signatures were collected to put the issue before voters. The anti labor legislation was soundly defeated. The

Manufacturers Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Retail Merchants outspent the labor coalition 8 to 1. This was the first referendum in over 50 years on the Ohio ballot. The national AFL-CIO proclaimed it one of the most important political victories for organized labor in decades.

The slander against Warren Davis is unsubstantiated, irresponsible, and vicious. Age discrimination is illegal. The members of Region 2 have been unjustly punished and deprived of democratic rights. Region 2 should be restored and Warren Davis should be permitted to fulfill the responsibilities for which he was duly elected.

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151