

Whistling Past the Graveyard: Live Bait & Ammo #178

Can the International UAW Concession Caucus reform itself with a self appointed ethics committee? I watched a video of our new UAW International President, Rory Gamble, speak at UAW Region Nine and he said they could with a gleam in his eye.

I must say he appeared to be a fun guy to have a beer with. He certainly presents better than Yokich. Of course, that's no compliment. Yokich was a thug and he made no bones about it. I remember and recorded in [LB&A#3](#) the most appalling moment of the 1998 UAW Constitutional Convention was when President Yokich, referring to the Caterpillar strike, said, "Don't let anyone tell you we didn't win that." Then he swung a left hook at a shadow and yelled, "Goddamn it!" He was delusional, or drunk, or a dramatically pathological liar.

Win? Win what? Cat workers went back to work not only with concessions they fought against for years, they went back to work with scabs that the UAW International Concession Caucus agreed to hire. WTF? Scabs didn't even have to pay back dues but strikers were required to pay back dues for their time on strike.

This bald fact bears repeating: After the UAW lost a long bitter strike against Caterpillar, UAW members, as part of the new contract, had to go back to work with scabs. The Concession Caucus protected scabs.

I asked George Cornwell, from UAW Local 974, a veteran in the struggle against Caterpillar and a [Blue Shirt](#). How does one deal with a scab?

"You get close to him," George said. "You're at his side all the time. You go to break with him. You go to lunch with him. You become his best friend because as soon as you abandon him the boss will take your place."

That's a tall order from a tall union man but fellowship, not animosity, is what it takes to build a labor movement that can thumb its nose at Right To Work For Less and scour the carpetbaggers from the halls of Solidarity House.

But Rory Gamble? He said he had represented UAW members for 38 years and purported that he was clean as a whistle strolling past the graveyard of solidarity.

I have to admit the man didn't look like a leech which, considering his position and engorged size, was hard to fathom. I used to do volunteer work at a halfway house for felons. I never met anyone in there who admitted he was guilty.

Most prisoners professed innocence and claimed, as did Brother Gamble, that all accusations were false. He was just a victim of bad company and ignorance of the

evidence that surrounded him. If indeed Gamble didn't know what was going on around him, why should we want the schlemiel for president?

And why as interim president assigned to clean house wouldn't he institute a secret ballot, one member, one vote for all International officials starting with him? Right now.

How in the hell are we so supposed to believe that anyone working for the Con Caucus could be clean? First of all, in order to maintain his standing he had to contribute to the Flower Fund which was nothing but a slush fund for the UAW hierarchy. They didn't collect money to buy flowers. The Flower Fund was a notorious slush fund that helped the Concession Caucus maintain authority and wallow in luxury.

Second, he was deeply involved with the Joint Funds, a convoluted contrivance to wash, rinse, and spin money from corporate coffers into UAW officials back pockets. Sorry, Rory, but you can't walk on the wild side and not have to wipe the shit off your shoes. Shit is Con Caucus terrain and Gamble was hip deep.

If he didn't receive money and gifts from the Joint Funds, he wouldn't be where he is today—top dog in the UAW Concession Caucus.

Gamble's assertion that he is pure is laughable, not because he may be sacrosanct in an alternative universe, but because no one in the Con Caucus can possibly be immune.

They all have to go.

We can do this two ways. Either the feds come in and clean house, or we clean house ourselves. Preferably, we should clean our own house. Abolish Joint Funds which is nothing but a bribery scheme, and elect by a secret ballot referendum reps of the rank and file, by the rank and file, for the rank and file. I doubt a Special Convention would achieve those goals because the Con Caucus would maintain control of proceedings. We need to organize Local to Local outside the control of the cons in charge of the International UAW.

I digress in order to exemplify my point.

In 2004 Federal Mogul, an automotive parts supplier, was in trouble. The company used an asbestos lawsuit to claim bankruptcy. Rather than accept responsibility, taxpayers and workers were put on the hook to pay the price for management's profligacy. No one in the oligarchic USA expects shareholders to act responsible and pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

The company took tax credits from the state and \$5.5 million in concessions from UAW members in Greenville, Michigan. Of course, they wanted more—more corporate socialism to bail out criminally negligent, incompetent management.

Federal Mogul demanded pay cuts of \$1.19 per hour, higher co-pays and premiums on an insurance policy with 10 percent less coverage, and fewer holidays. As an incentive, the company threatened to close the plant if UAW Local 2017 didn't agree to the concessions. That's not an incentive, it's extortion. That's not negotiation, it's a gun to the head.

It was a tough choice for workers in Greenville. The community expected to lose 2,700 jobs when Electrolux, the city's largest employer, moved operations to Mexico the following year. But rather than bite the bullet, UAW members spat back — no concessions!

Dan Wilder, a UAW member, stated that Local 2017 members were fed up with management's disrespect. "If you undervalue what you do," he said in an interview with the *Grand Rapids Press*, "you undervalue who you are."

In a stand-up vote (a public vote at a meeting) UAW Local 2017 shot the contract down 160-22.

UAW Region-D Director Don Oetman didn't object to the stand-up vote until he saw the result. Then he kicked into Con Caucus mode. He told members they would have to hold a secret ballot vote, claiming the stand-up vote intimidated members.

The stand-up vote, sometimes known as a "division of the house," was initiated at a union meeting. UAW member Ron Ladermann, who made the motion for a stand-up vote, explained there had been disputes over ratification in the past.

"They'd claim the contract passed by 80 percent, but you couldn't find 20 people who voted for it."

Ladermann, an auto-line operator with 28 years seniority, said, "I feel that if people feel strongly they should be willing to stand up and vote. It was quick and easy. You leave knowing what happened. It went smooth."

A motion passed by the membership stays in effect until it is rescinded by a two-thirds majority vote at a membership meeting. Since the UAW Constitution does not stipulate the voting process for ratification, the motion was in order per Robert's Rules of Order.

Six days after the contract was rejected Oetman called a second meeting. He explained that Federal Mogul would pull the contract offer if three conditions were not met: (1) immediate ratification, (2) a secret ballot vote, and (3) a recommendation in favor of the contract by the bargaining committee. In other words, the UAW Region-D Director was carrying water for the company and rebuking the membership. That, my friends, is classic Concession Caucus.

The bargaining committee refused to recommend the contract. They felt that as sole supplier of 94 percent of bearings for Ford automotive engines they were in a good position to bargain. The Greenville plant had always been profitable.

Federal Mogul used the plant as a showcase, a model of excellence and efficiency. UAW members in Local 2017 had shown a willingness to adapt to “constraint management,” which simply means, produce more with less workers. In the last ten years they’d cut the production workforce in half.

Local 2017 President Jeff Davis said, “We’ve done everything we could to stay competitive. We changed processes, combined classifications, and met the challenges. We are so lean now, all we can give is concessions. We deserve better.” The bargaining committee felt that if the company intended to move to Mexico or China, concessions wouldn’t prevent the decision.

Rank and file UAW member Ron Ladermann said, “It’s terrible what’s going on in this country. We have done everything they asked and more. We aren’t getting rich. We think we deserve every penny we get. We work hard. We are good at what we do. They make money on us and always have. Does a company have to rape employees to stay competitive? I agree with our city manager. It should be illegal for companies to threaten to move if they don’t get concessions. It’s extortion, government-backed extortion.”

And the Con Caucus did their incorrigible duty and promoted the extortion.

Local 2017 President Jeff Davis refused to approve a secret ballot vote because the membership had passed a motion for a stand up vote. So the International Con Caucus imposed a secret ballot vote without rescinding the motion. Don Oetman, the UAW Director of Region-D violated the UAW Constitution by revoking Robert’s Rules of Order and refusing to recognize that in a union meeting the members were the highest authority per the UAW Constitution.

The membership was not permitted to go home and think it over. The membership was not permitted to debate the pros and cons without the imposing presence of a Con Caucus rep, Region-D Director Don Oetman.

They were allowed to ask some questions and voice their opinions, but they had to make up their minds right then and there. Thus, the final company condition, immediate ratification, was met. Oetman acted as a representative of the company, not the UAW rank and file.

The contract passed by 14 votes, 103-89.

Oetman expressed his pleasure to reporters. He was proud he stood up for the company, but his demand for secret ballot voting may come back to haunt him in an unintended way.

The anti-union National Right to Work Foundation has repeatedly filed charges with the NLRB against card check neutrality agreements in organizing drives. They assert that only secret ballot votes are legitimate for union certification because workers get intimidated by union pressure.

It appears that Brother Oetman has provided substantial evidence that he concurs with their opinion. Secondly, the UAW Con Caucus refuses to permit secret ballot voting for International officials at UAW Conventions, including, you can bet your paycheck, at Special Conventions.

UAW rank and file members must organize outside the control of the Con Caucus if they truly want to clean house. Since this issue does not entail bargaining, there is no valid reason to prevent retirees from participating. We all want a union of the workers, by the workers, for the workers.

Stay Solid,

Gregg Shotwell