

Live Bait & Ammo #37

--Final Day of the Bargaining Con--

On the last day of the Bargaining Con, G-Finger & Co. Ltd. maintained strict control. International appointees patrolled the floor and instructed pigeons on what to say and when. It was well scripted. We heard delegates debate things like Customer Satisfaction.

Most speeches began with homilies to the great regional director [no director is ever referred to as anything less than great. In a peculiar twist of verbal lap dancing one delegate exclaimed the dynamic and lovable.] My new Regional Director, the Great Don Oetman sat behind me. Dissidents didn't have much chance to get the mic, but a few speakers did stand out.

Pete Miller from Local 12, an employee at St. Vincents Hospital in Toledo, Ohio expressed concern about the care that patients receive.

Hospitals are reducing the number of RNs giving patient care. They give RN responsibilities to Nurses Aides. While the Nurses Aides do a good job at what they are trained to do, they are not RNs.

Management is deskilling the hospital in such a way that the patient looks like they are getting quality care, when in fact they are not.

Also, they are cutting back on housekeeping. We have an increase in infectious diseases patients catch while in the hospital.

Management gives Respiratory Therapist work to RNs, as if the RNs don't have enough to do. When aides are short staffed they expect RNs to transfer patients to test sites.

The lean craze is effecting health care. The UAW and their corporate partners are encouraging it. In Solidarity magazine [September 2000] Ford and the UAW boasted of how they showed a hospital in Kansas City to function more efficiently.

Can you imagine?

We've witnessed how efficient the corporations are on the shop floor. We all know how they gain efficiency at workers' expense. We know that efficiency has never saved the customer a nickel, it has only lined the pockets of CEOs. Do we really want Ford and the UAW showing doctors and nurses, how to multi-task, downsize, reduce inventories, limit services, and cut the corners leaner?

Local 12 was the most articulate and outspoken Local at the convention. I'm glad they were there to enlighten us about the crisis in health care.

Don Southwell, president of Local 730, is from my region, (poor guy is often mistaken for me because of the similarity of last names). Don said, Pattern Bargaining is our most important foundation. By standing together we all reap the benefits of our labor. That is why we all walked with our brothers and sisters on Fremont St.

Simple, direct, comprehensive, and illustrated with a personal reference that included all of us. I can see why Don Southwell has been reelected as president of his local for so many years. He put the whole damn convention in a nutshell.

Then a stooly called the question. Debate ended, and before I knew it, we were singing Solidarity for Awhile... Maybe... Some... Times... Baby... Who Knows. We were out of there by noon. Now we were free to gamble our wits away on the membership's nickel.

In summary, delegates spoke loud and clear about the need to make outsourcing a strikeable issue and overtime voluntary. Many described how lean production causes ergonomic injuries, and chemical hazards are killing us.

Members want COLA on pensions, protection against Social Security age creep deductions, and improved health care plans with no co-pays, just like the International has.

There was no commitment to hold future conventions in Detroit instead of Vegas, and many issues were left unchallenged. For example, the Shoemaker Special - Permanent Temps.

I've heard from workers who have been temporary for five years. They pay dues, but the union will not write a grievance on their behalf. In a peculiar twist of union democracy they do have the privilege of voting for reps who will not represent them. When permanent positions open up, they are overlooked, and the jobs go to... guess whose kids?

Preferential hiring for Ad. Caucus relatives must stop. Shoemaker's son was hired at GM Truck & Bus. One year later he was granted an International appointment. Bravo! Son of a porkchopper weasels his way up and out of the ranks in a vibrant display of democratic tradition in the UAW.

Profit sharing deserves a real debate. Profit sharing contradicts union principles. It equates us with shareholders, decimates parity, [Ford gets thousands, GM gets little, IPS gets nothing], encourages competition between workers, and hitches our fortunes to the roller coaster formula. How much did we lose in the long run by sacrificing gains in our base rate for lump sum payments and profit sharing?

Two tier wage spells the demise of solidarity. We are digging the grave of the UAW with two tier wage concessions. Equal pay for equal union members.

Contract ratification is most important. The internet makes it possible for us to see the full contract before we vote. The Ad. Caucus will surely fight full disclosure. Remember the information blackout during negotiations in 1999? When it comes to negotiations, no news is bad news; ask Delphi workers. We should demand adequate time to study and discuss the contract.

Fast track ratification is an insult.

Active and retired members should organize a series of rank and file conferences in cities like Detroit, Cleveland, and Decatur. We should determine our own criteria and use the benchmark set by the shopfloor network to pressure the Ad. Caucus.

We should prepare to analyze and disseminate information about the contract prior to ratification. If our demands aren't met we should agitate for a "NO" vote.

Why should we trust the Ad. Caucus? They lied to Delphi members about their GM pension credits; they deceived all of us about co-pays on health care; they refuse

to open the books on joint funds. As long as joint programs are a part of our collective bargaining agreement we should have full disclosure over how those funds are spent.

The UAW's biggest challenge is Independent Parts Suppliers. There are more UAW members in IPS than in the Big Three. IPS holds the most potential for organizing. The 2002 President's Report states our success as a Union hinges on our success in independent parts.

We need a plan for IPS: National Pattern Contract, National Benefits Fund, Portable Pensions, and Preferential Hiring. Practical solutions for urgent needs.

Thousands of IPS retirees are destitute. They have no pension or prescription coverage. We have an obligation. We have a solution: the Retirees Dues Fund.

Instead of phony neutrality agreements, pleas to our corporate partners for civic responsibility and help in organizing, we need a contractual demand that states: UAW members will not handle scab parts. Clear, simple, and uncompromising.

We need a bargaining strategy that unites all sectors of the UAW in one force that speaks to the heart of the struggle. What better slogan than One Union/One Health Care Plan, for all active and retired members.

Corporate extortion and anti-labor laws are killing us. Teamwork is a ruse. Politics is a scam. Justice is won through confrontation not partnership with the boss.

There should be no compromise with employers who buy scab parts from union busters like Accuride.

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151