

Live Bait & Ammo #12

Points of Information

First thing in the morning Malcolm Marts from Local 1976 demanded a Point of Information. Yokich reluctantly agreed to follow protocol and recognized the member's right to ask for a point of information. What's your point, brother?

Malcolm responded: The last three days I've received more information from the Wall St. Journal than I have from our leadership. I was hoping President Yokich could spend some time explaining the strategies that are in place to save Delphi jobs.

Well, Brother, Yokich responded, We do have a strategy but I sure as hell ain't going to explain it to the Wall St. Journal. I'm going to explain it to the people sitting across the table.

You've heard my statements on Delphi. I believe GM should keep a majority of the stock at GM and not completely sell Delphi. I explained that yesterday if you were listening. Brother, I got to tell you something. We'll be talking to the company across the table. I don't want the Wall St. Journal telling what our strategy is.

I'm sorry you have to go to the Wall St. Journal for your information, but if you really want to know, you should get a hold of your Servicing Rep. We'll talk to your Servicing Rep. so he can answer your questions.

The mob applauded. Some may have felt that Malcolm was humiliated by this exchange. But apparently Malcolm had jerked the President's chain hard enough to pull him off his square.

Our President revealed he had a strategy he was unwilling to share with us (which is what the Wall St. Journal likes about him) but that he would share with his company partner across the table. The back room dealer doesn't inspire trust in the rank and file. Instead he incites suspicion, cynicism, and anti union sentiment.

More significantly Yokich informed us we should call our Servicing Rep for information on negotiations. Good suggestion, Brother Steve. Thanks. I encourage everyone to call their Servicing Rep or Regional Director and ask what's going on. Tell them, Yokich sent you.

Claudia Perkins from Local 651, Delphi Flint East, made a speech that sounded all too familiar.

"Delphi's approach to Work Place Organization is called lean but it's really downsizing. Employees aren't involved in the decision making process until after management has created a big mess. Then they ask for input from the membership. We are the experts. Why is that so hard for management to comprehend. When we attempt to give input we are blown off by management."

"Then they try to cram jointness down our throats. We need stronger contractual language to help curtail the way management approaches lean. We are coming up short in the so called process of jointness. We need to improve job security for our members."

Another base hit. Two on and nobody out. It was going better than I expected. Yokich attempted to skip to the next region when Dean Braid from Local 599 in Flint yelled for a Point of Information so loud and so long that Yokich could not ignore him.

Only a point, not a statement, Yokich snarled.

Most members I talked to said they wanted to knock off the spin-off of Delphi. I want to know how many such resolutions were submitted.

I don't understand, Yokich said. Most members you spoke to?

Yes, most members I spoke to at this convention are against the spin-off, Dean said.

So are we, Yokich said.

I understand that but you said publicly that you would allow up to 49% of it to be sold. Isn't that what you said?

I said: I told GM they have to keep 51% of the stock. That way after the IPO, they are still part of the GM system.

My point of information is: how many resolutions were submitted to stop the spin-off.

I got to tell you something. I don't think we had any. But I thought somebody should take a stand and I took a stand early.

The bases were loaded.

A few more delegates rose to speak but I was so eager to get to the plate I couldn't pay attention. When Yokich moved to Region 1-D, I waved my sign like a checkered flag at the Indy 500. He called on me. I couldn't believe it.

I felt like a pinch hitter going to bat with two out in the bottom of the ninth. I'd seen Yokich cut opponents down like Goliath. The mob reaction was on his side. I had to take the knife away. I had to make a play. And then it came to me: Muhammad Ali. I'll give him the old "rope-a-dope."

President Yokich, sir, I stammered, I humbly ask you, please, be patient with the passion I feel about the issue on which I am about to speak.

I acted jittery. I feel very strongly about this issue because it effects my livelihood, my future, and the welfare of my family. I hesitated, visibly struggling with the words and emotion.

I feel very strongly about this issue because it effects my union brothers and sisters. For example, my union brother, Tom Bradfield, seated next to me at the table. Tom is an elected delegate, a health and safety rep, a dedicated union member. He has worked for General Motors for 27 years at four different plants. He doesn't know today if he will retire with a GM pension because of the Delphi spin off. He deserves a GM pension. Thousands more workers are in a similar position.

The crowd was drawn into the emotion. Yokich dropped his guard. I threw the left hook. He never saw it coming.

Brother Yokich, I know that a resolution to STOP THE DELPHI SPIN OFF was submitted because I wrote that resolution and my Local supported it. I am certain that every Delphi facility in the country submitted similar resolutions, because it's in all our best interests.

At this point Yokich interrupted me and did a little rope-a-dope of his own. When Yokich disagrees with a speaker he interrupts, he tries to knock them off their square, and make them lose their train of thought. I waited calmly gathering my thoughts until he was done interrupting. I needed to win the delegates' support. I had to compel the members to buy in at a gut level. I stepped back up to the mic.

It's important that we stop the spin-off. It's important to all of us. If we allow GM to spin off Delphi, GM Powertrain, you're next. Ford/Visteon, you're next. Accustar, you're next. Independent Parts Suppliers, do you expect a pay raise if our wages are cut like Delphi intends? You assembly workers, where will your bargaining power be when your numbers are cut in half and you're snapping automobiles together like Leggo Blocks?"

A brother seated somewhere nearby said Preach, brother, preach. His words hit like a shot of adrenalin straight to my heart.

I raised my voice. Last summer after a seven week strike the leaders of GM and the UAW agreed to have more high level talks. They agreed to meet more often. They agreed to communicate openly and to improve the relationship. One week later GM announced the spin off. It was a slap in the face. It was an insult. It was a declaration of war. 46,000 UAW/Delphi autoworkers are mad as hell. And the eyes of 46,000 Delphi autoworkers are focused on this Convention today to see what our response will be. I ask the assembled delegates to rise, rise in solidarity and support for the Delphi autoworkers.

I held my breath. Two thousand delegates stood up and applauded. It wasn't a knee jerk reaction. It was a thoughtful, deliberate response. The assembled delegates clearly identified with the issues. The Delphi spin-off struck a unifying chord throughout the arena. The only

people who didn't stand up were the members of the International Executive Board and their staff seated on the stage. When the applause receded, I said thank you and walked away.

I guess you just haven't been listening to the leadership of this union, Yokich said. He was mad.

I started to walk back to the mic. If he was going to talk like that to me, I was going to talk back. I wanted to tell Brother Cut-the-Mic he hasn't been listening to the membership. I wanted to tell this President who said he will explain the strategy to the company across the table but not the elected delegates that we felt sold out.

No, no, you're not going back to the mic, Yokich said. I just want to tell you, I don't know how many damn times you have to say it for people to believe you. If you think your mad as hell, if you think Delphi is mad, you should have been with me when I got the phone call. Then you would know what mad as hell means, and I sure as hell didn't use the word hell.

The crowd jumped to their feet clapping and yelling STOP THE SPIN OFF, GIVE 'EM HELL. My grin reached up from the bottom of my feet. What luck! We just got two bangs for the buck. It was the biggest spectacle of the Convention. No one in attendance would forget this moment. Everyone was focused on the spin-off and Yokich had publicly repeated his commitment.

Credit Where Credit is Due

I don't mean to sound like I am blowing my own horn. I felt like I pulled a fire alarm for all union members who are threatened by the competitive agenda to maximize profits at the expense of working families. I had a lot of help in the uprising.

Malcolm Marts who confronted Yokich about his silence on the spin-off and was publicly chastised is not even an auto worker. He raised the flag because he saw the injustice and he is a man of principle and action.

Claudia Perkins crucified the Delphi Manufacturing System on the cross of jointness with all its broken promises. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. There was no talking back to Claudia.

Dean Braid who will be forced to relocate since Buick City is being shipped to China, set his own concerns aside, pushed the Delphi issue to the forefront, and set up my confrontation with Yokich like a golf ball on a tee.

Dean Braid is a name the Labor Movement will be hearing, come hell or high water, for a long, long time.

Edward Mosley, the man from Georgia, who said Preach, brother, preach. gave me a boost when I needed it. Afterwards I thanked Big Brother Mosley for his words. I told him I didn't think I could have pulled it off without him. I shook his hand, You were telling the truth, he said.

My man, Justin West, from the Mitsubishi plant in Normal, Illinois who moments before I spoke told me, I wanted to ask the delegates to stand in support of the Delphi autoworkers, but he wouldn't call on me. It was his idea and it was brilliant.

The old man, my mentor, Erwin Baur, who lent me his experience, strength, and hope. Two thousand plus UAW members who stood up together as if on cue. And the members of my own UAW Local 2151 who sent me to the convention and told me what to say, repeatedly, until I got it right.

I felt a little apprehensive that Tom Bradfield might be upset with me for making an example of him publicly. He shook my hand. He thanked me. He said, Everything you said was true, Gregg.

It All Leads to Outsourcing

After that a delegate from Local 1112 addressed Yokich directly.

When you were a vice president you were very concerned about joint programs. I remember you making the statement, If these programs aren't working we'll do something about them.

Some of these programs like EAP, Benefits, Health and Safety, are necessary. But some of the joint programs erode our seniority rights and erode our power in the plant. I think some of these programs need to be refined. They've been used as a political football and have caused a lot of resentment. All permanent appointments should be filled by seniority. The pressure for change in joint programs was unrelenting.

Steve Johnson from Local 5960 said, Due to management's unwillingness to involve the union, the only thing GM looks at in Workplace Reorganization is a reduction in jobs and a division between the rank and file. It all leads to outsourcing.

Legal vs Ethical

Then Dave Yettaw demanded a Point of Information. When we were in Las Vegas, Dave began.

What is your point of information? Yokich interrupted.

Joint Funds.

Wait a minute, David.

At the Convention in Las Vegas you said to bring it to the Collective Bargaining Convention.

What's your point of information?

The joint funds are used to fund many programs throughout our National Contract.

I know what joint funds are used for. I'm not going to allow you to make a statement on a point of information.

I want to ask that they be reported out in the form of an LM-2 because it's a separate entity of which our union is a part.

David, it's a separate corporation and not a part of this labor organization and that's why it's not reported out on our LM-2. We've gone over this completely with our lawyers. (When leaders are ethically but not legally obligated, they will take advantage of you for their own selfish ends.) As a union structure we are required to report out everything we do in an LM-2. But not as a separate corporation.

I think it should be reported, Dave said.

Turn off mic five, Yokich commanded. (Then they will demean you and disrespect you in order to justify their behavior and suppress their guilt.)

Thank you, someone in the crowd yelled, Solidarity!

Well, if you don't like the answer, Yokich snapped back, I'm sorry, it's the truth.

I don't like the answer, 'shut off the mic'!

Yokich refused to debate or consider a legitimate point of view.

Unions are required by federal law to list all financial information on a form called an LM-2. These forms are available to all members of the union. While joint funds support many programs negotiated in our National Contract, the funds are controlled by a corporation separate from GM and the UAW.

GM supplies all the funding for this separate corporation but because the method of funding is negotiated in our National Contract and includes a nickel per hour for every union member, half of the Board of Directors of this tax exempt corporation are UAW VIPs.

These people control the programs and the funding. About 30% of our International Reps and staff receive salaries, allotments, and expenses from this separate corporation. In other words GM funnels money into the hands of UAW reps through the conduit of this separate corporation. I'm sure the lawyers have fixed the deal and sealed approval with a kiss.

The question Dave Yettaw raised and Steve Yokich refused to answer is: Is it ethical? And if so why has the UAW adamantly refused to supply UAW members with information about the uses of joint funds and resisted forming any provisions for oversight?

After this display of antidemocratic behavior on the part of our UAW president, a union Brother got up and renewed my faith in the spirit of social movement unionism.

I recommend we all be prepared for a general strike. Sooner or later we are going to have to shut the economy down. Isolated strikes are social suicide. We should prepare for a general strike.

Yes!

The Heart of the Struggle

Finally, Oscar Salas from Local 1686 took the floor. As an IPS worker I would like to share a moment in my life that will live forever in my mind. Last summer, my wife, my stepson, and I walked the picket line in Flint on three different occasions. When the TV network noticed my 11 year old son carrying a picket sign and walking the line, they asked him: What are you doing here? He said, I'm here because I don't want my parents to lose their jobs.

The moral is: we at IPS plants have to face the same issues and struggles that our Brothers and Sisters at the Big Three face. We need your support the same way you need ours. We are all UAW. We have to support each other. In closing I would like to tell our Brothers and Sisters at Delphi that if the time comes, you can count on myself, my wife, and my son to be there for you.

I could not have invented a better ending. Oscar spoke the language of the heart, pure and simple. But something was missing.

What the IEB Didn't Want You to Hear

Gene Austin from Local 594 was never given an opportunity to speak despite the fact that he was seated a mere nine rows from the podium.

Gene Austin led a battle against corrupt local union politics that set the standard for integrity and a blueprint for the victory of union democracy.

The International Executive Board refused to recognize Gene and that is a powerful statement. The IEB did not want to hear what he had to say. We deserve to hear from leaders like Gene Austin. For that reason I wrote to Gene and asked him to contribute to this report.

He graciously replied. I want to speak on the issue of settling all local contracts before the national.

When the national contract is ratified before the locals have agreements, the bargaining position of the local unit is undermined. There have been incidents in the past when the International has settled the national contract before all locals have settled their contracts and as a result, some

locals found themselves victimized by local level management because the International could no longer strike all or any number of the multi-plant employers.

It is the duty of the International to give local unions all the support necessary to ensure fair and equitable settlements of their local agreements. Local 594 endured the hardship of an 87 day strike because the leverage just wasn't there."

"Even Locals that have the power to shut down an entire corporation, as did Locals 651 and 659 last summer, have been held hostage by the unforgiving corporation. The strength of each local union is greatly enhanced by association with the UAW International Union. Each local union depends largely on the International Union's ability to negotiate with major employers or amalgamated groups of employers."

It is not only necessary to settle all Local contracts before each National contract is signed, but it is also necessary to consider an entire industry-wide work stoppage to exert the power we need to win good contracts for our families.

Unions exist for the purpose of collective activity. The UAW's strength depends upon united action. The greater the unity, the greater the strength. The UAW membership is an organized industrial army. A strike is industrial warfare. The Big Three is our major enemy. No general wants to fight a battle with divided forces. The combined strength of the entire UAW membership in an industry-wide strike is more likely to bring a quick decisive victory than piecemeal actions against individual auto plants. A national, industry-wide strike is more likely to win the hearts and minds of the American people and galvanize public support."

"Most gains from UAW strikes in recent history have been extremely limited, failing to reflect the organized might of our union. This is because we consistently employ relatively feeble forces in battles with limited objectives.

We have been told that by striking one of the Big Three we can pit one against the other, damaging the struck corporation's sales by threatening it with a permanent loss of its share of the market when customers get acquainted with products of its competitors. We also have been led to believe that a strike against one of the Big Three is strengthened by the members who stay on the job and continue to pay into the strike fund.

Bitter experience has taught us that those concepts are errors. The Big Three build stock piles before a strike and do not lose sales. The idea that a large strike fund must be maintained to win a strike supports back to work sentiment when strike benefits are exhausted, deliberately withheld, or limited. Some of our strongest unions do not have strike funds!"

"The one-at-a-time strategy causes demoralization. Those who are on strike suffer to create a pattern which will benefit members who did not strike. The so called pattern as we have seen, is itself limited because the strike has been limited. Such weaknesses encourage management and help prolong strikes.

Therefore I ask that this assembly join with me and demand that the International Union not settle the National Contract until all Locals are settled, and insist that we abandon the self-defeating, strike breaking tactics of one-at-a-time struggles and mobilize the membership for an industry-wide strike to achieve our goals at the bargaining table.

Now you know why the IEB didn't call on Gene Austin.

Make History

I came to Detroit with the intention of pushing the Delphi spin-off to the forefront of the convention. On that score I was satisfied. I was encouraged by the consensus against spinoffs, outsourcing, modular assembly, two tier wages, lean manufacturing, temp work, corporate restructuring and dislocations.

I was encouraged by the unanimous support for improved job security, COLA on pensions and upgraded health care. I was encouraged by the number of delegates who challenged the leadership of the UAW. I was encouraged by the number of delegates who openly denounced the failed policy of the Cooperative Caucus.

Jointness has worked for the Corporations, the Appointees, and the International staff who benefit from the legal arrangement. But jointness has not worked for the rank and file of the union.

On top of all that, Yokich gave us a gift when he said, Call your Servicing Rep. I encourage everyone to call their Servicing Reps. Tell them Brother Steve told you to call if you had any questions about the negotiations. And while you've got his ear let him know what you won't settle for. Let him know you won't ratify a contract that protects the corporations' ability to outsource and downsize and dislocate workers. Tell them you won't vote for a contract that doesn't have COLA on pensions and portability.

Tell them you want the same health care coverage that International Reps have. Tell them you won't accept two tier wages or temp workers. Tell them not to settle the National Contract before all Local Contracts are settled. Tell them '99 should go down in history as the year the UAW started fighting back for all they were worth. Tell them '99 should be remembered as the year the UAW shut down the country with a general strike. Tell them we don't want to study labor history, we want to make history.

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151

Afterword:

Justin West challenged the leadership "to take the blinders off and be open and upfront with our membership." Bob King, the new UAW Vice President of Organizing, met personally with Justin and listened to his concerns. We need more leaders like Bob King.