

Live Bait & Ammo #21

As if we needed one more proof that the 1999 GM/Delphi Contract Highlights were a fraud and that the UAW International under the direction of Stephen P. Yokich was the most untrustworthy administration in UAW history..... What next?..... Where will it end?

The latest announcement of co-pays on GM/Delphi health care is one more nail in the coffin of Yokich's credibility. Contrary to declarations in the Highlights, "The UAW team turned back these efforts to shift costs to workers", we discover one year later that costs were shifted to workers. There are no reports of co-pays at Ford or Daimler. In '99 Yokich shredded pattern bargaining and dumped it in the trash. This latest travesty impacts retirees hardest as meager pension raises will not keep up with inflation and the increased medical costs they are forced to bear will steadily erode their living standard. Will co-pays continue to rise each year? Do International Reps have co-pays on their health insurance?

At the 1999 Bargaining Convention Yokich said, "If we don't address things honestly and upfront, we have a problem." Well damn it to hell, President Yokich, we have a problem and you are Up Front It. At the Bargaining Convention you acted tough on modular assembly saying, "Modular is just another word for outsourcing." Yet as you spoke negotiations steamed ahead for modular agreements in Lordstown and Lansing. Now we are seeing the fruit of that "upfront" of yours.

Members of Lansing Local 652 ratified an agreement whose highlights stated in bold letters: "There were no concessions in these negotiations by your Local Leadership." What the members of Local 652 didn't see was the post script entitled, "New Product Allocation Memorandum of Agreement" which states in item 23: "Non-competitive Local Demand Settlements from previous local negotiations will be canceled." Or item 24: "Elimination of skilled trades work assignment barriers during straight time hours [lines of demarcation]." Or item 27: "Minimal number of apprenticeable classifications for skilled trades employees." But the crux of the deal lies in item 21: "Consistent with this approach, non-core support activities (skilled and non-skilled) will be contracted, as required, to meet cost, quality and HPV [Hours Per Vehicle] objectives."

"Non-core support activities" will include: plant rearrangement, booth cleaning, janitorial services, carpentry, general stores, powerhouse, equipment cleaning, paint mixing, housekeeping, equipment installation, rail loading... The list goes on and on. By the time they're done modifying this Living Agreement the only union members left will be the Shop Committee. Modular assemblies include everything from the roof to the floor pan, from the cockpit to the exhaust, from the engine to the garnish molding. Hundreds of jobs have been handed over to non-union workers. Like Woody Guthrie once said, "Some people rob you with a fountain pen." And like my old friend Lenny Lineman once said, "Some people lie with a big toothy grin."

Of course Yokich smiling like a wolverine denies he knew anything more about these modular developments than he knew about the Delphi spin off. The largest corporation in the world drops its entire parts manufacturing division like a stealth bomb, and lo and behold, Delphi becomes the largest manufacturer of modular assemblies in the world.... Over night? Who could have seen that one coming? Like Lenny Lineman said, "That's why steam engines had cow catchers."

And that's why we are so happy now to have outsourcing language that specifies (in Highlights) "The International will be notified in writing...." at "the initial phase in the new product development process..." Which means at least one year ago Yokich and Shoemaker were informed in writing of all the outsourcing decisions at Local 652. The only ones in the dark were union members whose jobs were on the line. I've got to hand it to past UAW president, Owen "Big Burp" Beiber. Any concessions he made were "upfront". Like it or not we knew what we were voting on. (All right, all right, I haven't forgotten the moratorium on plant closings but that was less a lie than a misnomer that idled by while the Beiber burped.) As lawsuits and investigations of corruption in the UAW proliferate we hear not a peep from Sold Our Dignity House. Instead of clearing the smoke and putting out the fires, restoring the integrity of a proud UAW tradition, the Rollover Caucus is busy harboring and protecting the likes of the Donny "Debonair" Douglas who used local union funds to pay a legal defense team and compensation for a sexual harassment lawsuit which he defended by saying that a pat on the butt wasn't harassment, it was "motivational." Like Lenny Lineman said, "Donny Debonair is going to get lots of motivation from Bubba." While "Debonair's" Local 594 and GM are under criminal investigation for bribes paid to committeemen among other unethical practices, Harold "Hawk" Wright is charged with conduct unbecoming a

union member. Apparently in the new UAW accepting bribes and using local union funds for personal lawsuits without the members' permission is kosher but informing members of the truth is "unbecoming". Hawk is a fearless leader in the effort to keep members informed. Hawk describes himself this way: "I'm a UAW member, I've worked the assembly line for 23 years. I've earned my degree with sweat and blood. I think no differently of any working person whether they be union or non-union, assembly line worker, or yes, office worker. I'm no better for what or where I've worked. I'm the lowest of the low, the bottom rung. I don't deserve what I have. Not when so many others' rights have been trampled worse than mine. God be with all the workers who struggle without the benefits I enjoy. That's why I fight corporate greed and union corruption. Because if there are no freedom fighters the demise of the middle class will only be hastened."

"I swear allegiance to my Sisters and Brothers on the line, in the pits, the foundries, all the places where shop rats roam. Others can fight for who they want. Every working day I see the abuse my peers are subjected to. I know my turf and that's where the battle will be won." "In 1937 the Flint workers didn't win by talking in some fancy office or by waving a flag in front of a stinkin' office building like Sold Our Dignity House. No, that battle was won in the plant, on the front line, in the trenches with battle tactics having no politics. The movement was logical, swift, and effective. Like all things of wise decision, it's beauty is still seen and honored to this day."

"No one will tell me how to fight or who to fight for. That's already determined and beware to any s.o.b. that gets in my way. We must push forward in the workplaces where our power is. We must bring the enemy onto our ground not parade on theirs. History will repeat itself if not in our time, soon thereafter. Be ready Brothers and Sisters."

Hawk spearheaded a drive that collected over \$7,000 for locked out workers at Local 2036 whose strike benefits were cut off. Hawk is a dedicated activist. The charges against him are a transparent effort to repress freedom of speech and keep union members in an information blackout. The perpetrators of these frivolous charges against free speech and the right to dissent seek to dismantle the democratic principles of our union because they are unable to combat ideas they don't like with ideas of their own. They need to censor because they can't justify their actions.

At Local 685 in Kokomo, Indiana, a Daimler transmission plant, Bob Bolton resigned his position as committeeman and filed complaints against the union and the corporation. He claims union reps are paid by the corporation for more hours than they work; that they do not represent members on the shop floor fairly; that they are altering the local contract without the members' consent. Subsequently, he was threatened by an International Rep at a Local Union meeting; he and his supporters were verbally harassed on the shop floor; anonymous backstabbers used company copiers to distribute slander; phone callers threatened his children; shots were fired at his house. If the allegations held no substance, why would anyone resort to such vile means of retaliation? The International is ignoring the crisis. Yokich, instead of stepping up to his responsibilities, demanding a halt to hostilities, and conducting an investigation, is lending his tacit consent. Yokich imposed an administratorship on Local 2036 for refusing to ratify a union busting contract but allegations of racketeering and gangsterism fail to evoke even a faint response from President Upfront.

Then, 3/22/03 in a sudden and cryptic twist of events Yokich flip-flopped on Local 2036 and decided not only to reinstate strike benefits but to double the pay to \$350 per week. Good news, but what does it mean in light of the fact the International has shown no backbone in the struggle for a fair contract. Gary Sorrell, the International's appointed knee-bender, was prepared to give Accuride everything they wanted but he was confronted by the Local's officers in the parking lot and they blacked out all the concessions the membership didn't approve. Most of these folks down in Henderson, Kentucky were reared in the tradition of the United Mine Workers. They weren't raised to rollover. The International has tried to exclude Billy Robinson from negotiations though he has a constitutional right to be included and the membership wholeheartedly supports him. It appears the International is willing to approve any yellowdog contract as long as it keeps the dues dollars rolling into the coffers. In lieu of a fighting strategy to win a fair contract Yokich's only motivation for reinstatement of strike benefits may be to stem the tide of bad publicity and curtail future legal liabilities for not living up to the responsibilities of a union. International V.P., Ron "Ficklefinger", authorized the strike then reneged on his commitment. Twenty-five years of union dues and strike fund contributions constitutes a commitment not essentially different from an insurance policy. The results of that double-cross devastated the families of Local 2036.

While members were deprived of strike benefits for 14 months Yokich sunk \$14 million (an unsecured loan) into Pro Air which has since gone bankrupt. A million dollars a month would have gone a long ways in Henderson, Kentucky. \$14 million would have paid strike benefits and waged a kick ass corporate campaign against Accuride. Instead Yokich chose to piss away our money playing junior stock broker.

Mary McGan who worked 23 years for Accuride endured 14 months in fear for her life as she could not afford \$137 a month for blood pressure medication. If not for friends and family, she would have lost her home. In the beginning the International promised to stand behind Local 2036 "for as long as it takes" but as Mary says, "They stood so far behind us we couldn't see them. Now they want us to ratify a yellowdog contract that isn't worth two cents. They want us to give up everything we struggled for and built up over the years." Mary still walks the picket line. "The union is good," Mary said "but the corruption needs to be corrected." She believes, "One member/one vote is the only way to make the leadership accountable."

Billy Pugh, also a member of Local 2036, will turn 65 in March. He exhausted his retirement savings and owes \$68,000 for a bypass surgery he had to undergo after the International cut off his health insurance. Billy still walks the picket line. The real union is alive and well in Henderson, Kentucky; strong and proud and solid in every way. This struggle can and must be won.

The UAW's foremost challenge today is organizing parts plants in the South. UAW members at Delphi, Visteon, Lear, and American Axle have a vested interest in maintaining standards at part suppliers. A victory in Kentucky will do more to convince workers to join the struggle for economic justice and human rights than hollow words and empty promises. We need to write letters to local news agencies. We need to inform the public that scab wheels are no safer than scab tires. We should picket Ford dealerships. Union members should decline to handle scab products. Teamsters should refuse to haul scab wheels that may end up on trucks they drive. IBEW members should stop crossing the picket line at Accuride. There is no reason the International could not ask for compliance. We should ask the CAW for help as well. We need a nation wide corporate campaign against Accuride. We can't accept defeat and expect credibility in the eyes of non-union workers in the South.

Benefits have been reinstated but the only fair remedy is to make whole all who have suffered losses due to the severance of health benefits and strike pay. The International imposed an administrator on Local 2036 and he depleted the Local's resources. Funds are needed to continue the battle for a fair contract. Send a pledge of Solidarity to: Henderson Workers Solidarity Fund, c/o Billy Robinson, PO Box 248, Sebree, KY 42455.

(Personally, I like Tom Laney's idea for a fund raiser: a debate between Ron "Ficklefinger" and Billy Robinson moderated by Victor Reuther.)

Nancy Schillinger, another warrior on the front lines in the battle for justice, was discharged from the Ford Twin Cities Assembly Plant for refusing to submit to an unwarranted psychological evaluation. The Local Union president, Scot McKenzie, then kicked her out of the Union on a technicality. Apparently suckup McKenzie supports Ford's use of EAP's to repress dissidents. If this is where partnership leads, we are all in trouble. The UAW was built by troublemakers like Nancy Schillinger.

If you, like Nancy, believe in solidarity; believe in equality and fair representation; believe union members have a right to demand the company adhere to the contract; believe in union democracy; believe the union is the people and not just the people in power and their appointees; believe in standing up for your rights; believe in questioning authority; believe justice cannot exist without due process and a fair hearing; believe the union should defend workers' rights; believe the union should fight corporate assaults against human dignity; believe in free speech and the right to dissent; and have the courage to act on your convictions, then you too may be due for a discharge pending a psychological evaluation by a company quack. And if you don't comply to the humiliation, you may be kicked out of the "new UAW".

What next? Where will it end if we don't fight back? Power respects power not punks. Join the UAW Solidarity Coalition at <http://hawk.addr.com/uawsc/index.htm>

In Solidarity,
UAW Local 2151