

Live Bait & Ammo #33

--The Real Baloney--

On the third day of the convention the auditorium was so full of helium balloons I felt like I was in the bottom of a bubble gum machine. I may have voted wrong a few times. Balloons got in my eyes and several of my industrial brothers were snorting helium and speaking in tongues. The scene reminded me of something former UAW president, Owen Beiber, once said: When we get done with them they'll be able to tell the real baloney from the phony baloney.

There are no surprises in solidarity heaven. All Ad. Caucus nominees won by acclamation, and the band played "Happy Days Are Here Again," again. The Administration didn't even bother with the formality of asking for other nominations, not that anyone could have been recognized in the babble of balloons.

The official Ad. Caucus promotional booklet cited our union's vibrant tradition of union democracy and boasted, Throughout its history the UAW has produced leaders who have worked their way up through the ranks.

Elizabeth Bunn symbolizes the new UAW more than anyone else on Ron's Team. Bunn, an attorney, was appointed in 1985 by Owen Beiber as an associate general counsel of the UAW assigned to the president's office.

She was not a UAW member at the time and didn't become a UAW member until she joined the National Writers Union after they affiliated with the UAW in 1991. She has never filed a grievance, campaigned for elective office, or been told she was lucky to have a job after complaining of sexual harassment.

The one party state is well ordered. The International Rubber Stamp Board was acclamated, congratulated, adulated, and nary a balloon went pop. Then we broke off into separate rooms to acclamate our acclaimed Regional Directors. In Region 1-D we acclamated Don Oetman. A few weeks later he appointed Owen Beiber's son, Mike, to be his assistant director. So we know where Oetman is coming from. Mike Beiber was president of my Local. He was never a committeeman or a negotiator. When we voted him out of office, he was promptly appointed to the Regional, where he worked as a bookkeeper.

Former UAW president, Owen Beiber, facilitated the Region 1-D meeting I attended. He was happy things went so smoothly for Ron's Team and reminisced about the contentious years he served as president.

During Beiber's era, the 1980s, New Directions, an opposition party, was a real contender and the Ad. Caucus had to resort to illegal tactics and behind the scenes pressure to suppress the insurgents. In 1986 a Department of Labor investigation uncovered fraud and corruption by the Ad. Caucus and forced a new election. Jerry Tucker, a New Directions leader, won as Regional Director of Region 5. He appointed Lew Moyer to the Resolution Committee.

Lew Moyer is an African American whose integrity, political savvy, and street wisdom have garnered broad support from the shop floor. This was the ninth consecutive convention he attended. I had an opportunity to speak with Lew at the convention. His voice resonated with the conviction of a long march to freedom.

Just because you don't succeed at overthrowing the administration doesn't mean you aren't having an impact. He told me that in 1988 when he was on the Resolution Committee he presented the minority report. The army of Ad. Caucus followers stationed throughout the audience booed and hissed. He held his ground. He said that many of the ideas he presented had since been adopted. The opposition does have an influence.

He recalled how when he first advocated for the UAW to support Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress he was accused of being a communist. When Beiber received the UAW Social Justice Award, Beiber's support for Nelson Mandela and the ANC was cited.

Lew is the Bargaining Chair of Local 110. He was fired for leading a wild cat strike. The International could have demanded prompt reinstatement, but they are still working quietly behind the scenes to suppress dissent.

Day Four of the Constitutional Con

Day four started almost two hours late. Ad. Caucus followers were getting drilled and scripted in separate rooms. It seemed not all had gone well in solidarity heaven. Region 2 rubber stamped the wrong guy. Davis was supposed to retire and

his assistant director, Rich Vadovski, was supposed to be acclamated. Both Davis and Vadovski were nominated. Then Vadovski, loyal follower that he was, declined the nomination. He had no choice. He couldn't think for himself.

Under Ad. Caucus rules (not union rules, as that would be age discrimination and illegal), Warren Davis was supposed to retire. Instead, he pulled a fast one, decided to run again, and won. Suddenly, Steve Yokich's good friend and solid unionist who was going to take on those bastards in congress was a snake. Judging from the volume of venom there was more than one snake in the pit, and none bigger than Yokich.

Over night the Constitution Committee [handpicked by the Ad. Caucus] came up with a new amendment to resolve the problem of the errant rubber stamp: dissolve the whole Region. The members of Region 2 would be divvied up among three other regions. The iron fist would not only deprive Warren of his coup, it would exterminate everyone he ever appointed. It was redistricting on a scale that would shame the toupee off a carpetbagger.

Warren Davis poked a hole in the balloon of our vibrant tradition of union democracy. One Ad. Caucus follower exclaimed, We didn't have a choice!

What's the point? We never have a choice in the one party state. Sorting out the devil in the deal would be much simpler with democracy, but we've settled for a facsimile.

After Vadovski declined the nomination the delegates were left with no choice but to acclamate a person they had acclamated for years. So what? It wasn't a constitutional crisis. It was an Ad. Caucus snafu. We should have dissolved the Caucus. It didn't merit a constitutional amendment to suddenly, without any preparation, dissolve the whole region. But the Party rules with an iron fist. This amendment was an impulsive, irresponsible retribution: Yokich's parting kiss.

A member of the Constitutional Committee read the amendment and admonished anyone who dared to say the UAW was undemocratic. As if this amendment was a defense of democracy rather than a political reprisal. Yokich chaired the debate.

The first delegate from Region 1-A supported the resolution because it was for the good of all not just one.

The second delegate from 1-A supported on the basis that consolidating the regions conserved financial resources.

A delegate from Region 2 said he had been attending conventions since 1968 and had never seen anything like it. He had committed himself to vote for Rich Vadovski but he went to the meeting and Rich decided to give my vote away. After all those years he finally noticed someone else was controlling his vote.

The next delegate from Region 2 said, Yesterday our Region held a legal election. It was according to our constitution, we had nominations, we had discussion, we had elections. I am outraged at this amendment not because of the politics but because this is America. We have a fundamental right to our vote. And what this amendment does is take away my vote."

"That's not right. The politics should have been discussed yesterday. I'm not privy to all the politics. I'm a new member of this union, only two years. I've been in the private sector for a long time, but I value my right as an American and I don't like this. I don't like that the International is trying to circumvent the vote I was elected to give by my union.

The next delegate was Willie Hubbard, president of Local 1250 Region 2. He said, I guess some must think I am crazy for getting up here and opposing this resolution. It's just like running through an open flame of gasoline.

But my reason for opposing this is for the members of Region 2 and the members of my Local. I know that trust means a lot. I know once you lose trust you lose a lot. I am just as stunned as anyone in this room by the actions which occurred yesterday. Am I pleased? Am I happy? No. But I ask that you reconsider this resolution and put everything back into the perspective we had yesterday for the sake of all the members of Region 2 and Local 1250.

I realize and recognize that the Regional Director is from my home local. I realize and recognize the fact that the assistant director has also given a commitment. I

was in the dark along with all the other delegates in this region. I myself don't like what transpired as much as you, Steve.

I know that you can be a very vindictive person at times. [catcalls] I didn't say vindictive for the catcalls, but I know how Steve can be at times when he wants to clear up a dispute. And it's good to have a person like that because first of all, those of you that are doing the catcalling you need a person like that when you go into negotiations. Where the company doesn't look at this individual as a weak person.

Yes, vindictive sometimes can be an advantage not a disadvantage. For those that are catcalling. But Brother Yokich, I ask you and the delegates here, will you please consider this resolution and restore Region 2 as a single Region within the UAW.

Later, I shook Brother Hubbard's hand. I told him I respected him for running through that open flame of gasoline. He said, I've been through the civil rights movement: dogs and clubs and fire hoses. I'm not afraid of these guys.

In response to Willie Hubbard, Yokich described how other regions had been joined together in the past, which is true. The difference this time was the lack of deliberation and planning, and the political retribution evident in the timing. I didn't hear anybody speaking against that. (someone yelled Yes, We did!) Yokich said, We've done it before. So we are not nailing a region or a person, we are just doing what's right for this union.

The next delegate from Region 2 said that while other regions had been combined in the past we knew up front and all of us delegates talked about it before we did it. On that point he corrected Yokich, but then he said, I told the people what I was going to do before I came. I signed a commitment before I came saying who I was going to support for Regional Director. I don't believe in being backdoored, undermined, or not told up front what was going to happen.

He said he thought Warren Davis and his staff had done a good job but he supported the resolution.

Another delegate from Region 2-B said I don't believe that in the history of our union we have ever combined two regions after an election. Is that true or false?

(no answer) If I had run for election in my region and won would you then combine regions and over turn my election as well?"

"I ask you this because we have a constitution that is in place, and those regions are set up prior to the election, and after that election, now you want to come in here and adjust the constitution. I think it's unfair. I don't agree with it personally.

Yokich responded. Brother, let me just say if that was the case I think somebody gave you bad information. I'm not going to debate it with you, but we're going to have a recess this afternoon so the regions can have elections. That's how we've done it in the past. That's how we're going to continue to do it.

The next delegate from Region 1-D said, he supported. He thought the members of the region would get better representation and services if their election was overturned and their region combined with three other regions.

The next delegate from Region 1-D said, Sister and brother delegates, we all know right from wrong. We are all reasonably intelligent people or our membership wouldn't have sent us here. We know what treachery in high places looks like. We know what solidarity is and what it isn't. Brother Yokich, I respectfully call the question.

One may call the question whenever they are recognized by the chair, but it is improper to give a speech, and then call the question. He should have been ruled out of order and the debate continued.

Yokich responded, I really wanted to debate this, but.....

Hands up. Hands down. Debate done. Amendment passed.

[Erwin Baur, a retired UAW member and long time union activist, and Jerry Tucker, retired Region 5 Director, both told me that Walter Reuther would never allow someone to call the question. Erwin said, Reuther listened. Of course, he would have been booed from the floor if he tried to end debate. Tucker related that in 1970 when Woodcock was president they debated a resolution on dues for a couple hours.]

I demanded a point of order. I simply stated: This amendment of Article 10 is untimely and retroactive. It should be rescinded.

Yokich responded, We'll consider your advice.

Later in the day we were asked to approve an amendment to Article 10 Section 15 which stated: Copies of all resolutions and constitutional amendments to be considered by the Convention must be approved by the Local Union membership and sent to the International Secretary-Treasurer not later than six weeks prior to the date set for the Convention.

Of course, the Ad. Caucus can submit an amendment on the morning of the final day of the convention. They can even delay the convention for a couple hours while they work on it and drum up support.

We heard a bunch more speakers. We took a long break so Regions 8, 9, and 2-B could re-rubberstamp AC anointed directors. We approved a resolution to give Steve Yokich a cottage at Black Lake. We gave everybody raises, plus 3% per year, plus cost of living, plus expenses, plus whatever they wanted.

The Constitution Committee reported that local unions submitted 221 proposed changes to the constitution. Not a single one of those resolutions was discussed. Only resolutions submitted by the Ad Caucus deserve attention in the one party state.

We all held hands to sing Solidarity Forever but someone forgot to project the words onto the video screen. So we hummed in totalitarian harmony.

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151

Correction: In LB&A #33 I said that newly appointed Assistant 1-D Regional Director Mike Bieber had never been a committeeman. I was wrong. He served two terms as a committeeman and helped negotiate the first two contracts at Local 2151 which was chartered in 1981.