

Live Bait & Ammo #36

--Day Two of the Bargaining Con Continued--

Health Care for All (Even IPS) - David Dunn, president, Local 407: I support National Health Care. I feel at this time we are falling short of a goal that we need to protect people. IPS workers in small local unions struggle with the cost of health care.

Yesterday, we had a march downtown. The theme was One Union/One Health Care Plan. Let's not fall short of that goal. The UAW has 1.3 million members. Can you imagine a single payer system for all UAW members? What insurance company would not want to take that on?

At small individual IPS plants we see increasing plant closings due to health care and outsourcing. I don't feel our concerns in IPS get enough attention. International Reps from all different states have one insurance plan. Why can't all UAW members, whether from the Big Three, IPS, the public sector, and retirees have a single payer provider?

There's no reason we can't pursue this goal. Retirees whose plants close deserve more protection. I support the goal of National Health Care but we can't trust politicians.

My Local submitted a constitutional resolution advocating a single payer insurer for all UAW members, but it was ignored by the Ad. Caucus. I was glad to hear another IPS Local appeal for a socially progressive union solution to the health care crisis.

Sherry Maxim, Local 12, St. Vincents Hospital in Toledo, Ohio: Quality health care is being pushed aside by corporate greed. Hospitals, health care facilities, and health insurers are merging together, buying out doctors' practices, and forming large corporations whose bottom line is profit.

Health care workers have become victims of forced overtime, layoffs, minimal benefits and increased work loads. By adding job duties of other disciplines [condensing classifications and dissolving lines of demarcation] we are being restructured to do the impossible.

As consumers and patients we are paying more for less care. This effects every one of us when we need medical care. We need to support minimum staffing ratios. As patients we need to ask questions of management. Just who is taking care of us, how many hours do they work, and how does their patient work load effect their care.

We need to make health care institutions accountable to both patients and workers. Our lives are at stake because of it.

Where We Came From

A retiree from Local 372, Region 1-A, reminded us of what the UAW used to be like. He said, My name is John Trohimczyk, hard to pronounce, easy to get along with. With over 500,000 retirees in our great and democratic union we are a force that many have taken notice of.

We have always supported our union especially in political action. The bread box and the ballot box go hand in hand. Let's not forget this. Having a pension at one time was unheard of. I remember in 1950, we went on strike for 104 days to establish a vested pension at Chrysler under Walter Reuther.

It wasn't as cold as it is in here because I was standing by the fire warming up while I was picketing. It wasn't easy but we all stuck together and unity prevailed. A pension is a wonderful thing to have.

However, we need to keep pace with the inflation that keeps staring us in the face each day. We need further protection on our pension with a modified cost of living clause to ensure us this protection, and upgrade our pensions periodically.

Each delegate in this room will eventually be joining the ranks of the retirees. Remember when you improve the pension plan for retirees now, you improve it for your self. Retirees are the backbone of our great union. They made the union what it is. They made many, many sacrifices.

Nothing comes easy.

In conclusion let me say, I have always considered the active workers and retirees as one; a family united for social justice and improved working conditions. United we will prevail and accomplish our goals for a better tomorrow. Let us never forget where we came from and where we've been. Long live the UAW and may God bless us in the up and coming negotiations.

I am afraid Brother John is one of the last of a dying breed. A breed that believed there is nothing more pragmatic than idealism; nothing more rewarding than the pursuit of social justice; nothing more real and powerful than workers united.

Union members today are cynical. The Beiber and Yokich legacies left a bitter taste.

As delegates spoke from the floor The Finger worked the crowd. He strolled the aisles, shaking hands, giving autographs, and posing for pictures. He didn't give a shit what the peons had to say.

Bob King chaired the next section on non-economic resolutions. I've heard a lot of stories about how militant Bob King used to be. Now he organizes by video.

Workers Against Chemical Hazards

Duane Carroll, a millwright from Local 2195, described acid leaks that have eaten through the doors, walls, and electrical panels. He said acid leaks had damaged the structural integrity of the building posing serious hazards to safety above and beyond air pollution. He said, Fumes have damaged vehicles in the parking lot.

What are the fumes doing to us? We have had numerous members who passed on due to brain tumors and cancer. The EPA has come out and drilled holes where engineers have specified to check for contamination in the ground. They claimed there were no contaminants in the ground.

So what is the vapor coming out of the guard post holes in heat treat? If acid fumes are eating our machinery, dies, and equipment, what is it doing to our lungs and our bodies?

I have personally reported this to Health and Safety, and management, but it is overlooked. We need UAW Health Safety support.

Members of UAW Local 1436 at Hitachi in Edmore, Mi. have similarly complained about their toxic worksite. The ground water is so contaminated Hitachi furnishes bottled water for residents. Now Hitachi wants their taxes reimbursed because they claim their property has been over evaluated for years.

After all, it's a toxic dump, and as such it's totally worthless. Why should they pay any taxes? Corporate terrorism is capitalist etiquette in America.

The UAW brags how their Health and Safety programs have reduced fatalities (not counting the explosion at the Rouge Power House) but they don't calculate the deaths and illness caused by exposure to toxic chemicals.

At my local we passed a motion to set up a Workers Against Toxic Chemical Hazards committee to do a mortality study. The Local E-Board has refused to act on the motion. They insist the International has already conducted a study of our plant and found no problems.

I have repeatedly asked to see the documentation. I have even written to Solidarity House requesting the documentation, but I have never seen the report. We worked with large open tanks of Freon until it was outlawed. No matter how strong the fumes from calibration fluid, our Industrial Hygienist assures us the air sample levels are within safe limits.

Meanwhile, the Surgeon General warns us to beware of sunshine.

Ergonomics in the Lean Era

Tony Talorino, Local 551: I'm from an assembly plant where ergo conditions result in workplace injuries, poor health, bad morale, and high absenteeism. These conditions all have an impact on personal wellness as well as the quality of our products.

On occasion I personally find myself coming home from work unable to bend over and untie my work boots as well as struggling to pick up my kids. This is a direct

result of spending 8-10 hours on a job that was not set up in an ergonomically sound manner.

Joe Taylor, Local 1892: We have an active ergonomics committee but when we identify ergonomic problems that are hurting people management tells us there is not enough money to fix these concerns despite joint funding. New equipment has accessible lockout points but management tells us there is no money to fix old machinery.

Once again, a contract without enforceable penalties is worth less than confetti on the day after the parade. After Bush repealed US ergonomic standards Yokich said that it wouldn't really effect UAW members. Which goes to show how out of touch he was with the shopfloor where speedups and multi-tasking exact the toll for lean production methods supported by the Ad. Caucus.

Then, Video King called on me again. What can I say? He asked for it. The Ad. Caucus portrays itself as socially progressive, but time and again they side with corporations at the expense of working families.

I wanted to address the resolution which states that Violence in the Workplace is often a by-product of stressful social problems and advocates access to targeted mental health and counseling referrals.

As usual my agenda was to expose hypocrisy.

UAW Opposes Mental Health Parity

In the course of a Community Mental Health forum, I heard IPS employers testify that Mental Health Parity laws would help them provide better mental health benefits for their employees.

There were some State Representatives present. They claimed they couldn't pass Mental Health Parity laws because the UAW opposed it, and they couldn't go forward without the support of the UAW.

I couldn't believe it.

Ostensibly the UAW is a progressive union. It seemed inconsistent to me. So I contacted Solidarity House. I was informed the UAW is against all mandates for special interests.

First of all, Mental Health Parity is not a mandate. It simply means that insurance coverage for mental health should be equal to medical health.

Second, mental illness is not a special interest group. One in five families will face a major mental illness in their lifetime. The surgeon general reports that two-thirds of all Americans with mental illness go untreated. Many of them are homeless or in prison.

The shocking tragedy of the woman in Texas with post partum psychosis who drowned her children may have been preventable. She was terminated from residential treatment prematurely. Her discharge summary noted, insurance restrictions as the reason for discharge.

President Clinton's task force on Mental Health Parity estimated insurance premiums would rise one percent if parity laws were enacted. 90% of union households support Mental Health Parity. 76% of union households said they would support Mental Health Parity even if premiums went up.

Even President Bush has come out in support of Mental Health Parity. The UAW opposes Mental Health Parity because they say it costs too much. We cannot justify discrimination against the mentally ill. Mental Health Parity is an issue of social justice and equal treatment.

Bob King said, Thanks, and made a note not to call on me again.

A sister from Local 12, St. Vincent's Hospital, Toledo, Ohio whose name I couldn't catch, said: Exposure to toxic chemicals, noxious odors, sudden loud noises, multiple body fluids, infectious diseases (some deadly), sudden outbursts from potentially violent persons, heavy lifting, inadequate equipment, long periods of walking and standing, multiple duties and tasks that require excellent communications skills but may cause mental stress are part of the ordinary job health care workers deal with daily.

Increasingly, health care workers injuries are being ignored. They are told they are hazards of the job. They are encouraged not to file a claim, and when they do, they have to fight to receive any benefits. They are strongly encouraged to return to work long before they should, or risk losing their job status.

We need to support health and safety in the workplace for everyone.

Next, they showed a video. I went out into the hallway where I met Pablo Lopez, a retiree from Flint. He was campaigning for a new holiday in honor of Caesar Chavez and handing out buttons.

He said, Shotwell, you keep getting the mic. Next time, yell, Viva Chavez! We need a holiday for Caesar Chavez.

I told Pablo that I doubted very much I would get called on again today - maybe ever, but if I did, I would remember Chavez.

FlipFlop Shoemaker took over as chair.

Vacant Seats and Empty Stares - Paul Guthrie, Local 503, Region 1-D: I'm real disappointed today to see so many vacant seats in here. I've been sent to Black Lake at least three times. I've been sent to CAP Conferences numerous times. Never once did I miss a meeting. I always stayed for the duration. Never once did I come in late or with a hangover. In all those years I never once wasted a nickel of my local's money.

The FlipFlop called on me, (I can't help it if I'm lucky, or they're stupid). Maybe it was simply a matter of too many vacant seats and empty stares as Brother Guthrie noted.

My topic didn't fit into the resolution at hand, but I didn't really care. What kind of dissident would I be if I followed all the rules of the ruling party?

Several years ago I interviewed Owen Beiber about the GM strike in 1970. At that time Owen was a servicing rep. Owen said that in 1970 the UAW struck GM for 30 Out, and COLA. They were out for a couple of months and eager to return to work.

But when they reached a tentative national agreement, Leonard Woodcock refused to put the contract up for a ratification vote until all local union contracts were ratified. Suddenly Owen had tremendous leverage with a stubborn employer. GM exerted enormous pressure on plant managers to settle quickly.

Somewhere along the line we lost that tradition. In our last set of negotiations, we ratified the national but many locals went a year or longer without a local agreement.

Delphi took advantage of the no strike clause to belittle local bargaining committees, make them look ineffectual, and force changes in work rules, classifications, lines of demarcation, and production standards.

If we didn't ratify the national until all locals were ratified, I believe our local unions would have more leverage, more power. In closing I would like to encourage the International to get a new holiday for Caesar Chavez, March 31.

Shoemaker replied, Did you want to speak on the motion at all, Brother Shotwell?

I went back to the mic but it was dead. I wanted to say... well, you know what I wanted to say... I wanted to say what any Delphi worker who'd been lied to, cheated, and betrayed by Shoemaker wants to say.

I don't have to spell it out to you.

To be continued...

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151