

Live Bait & Ammo #32

--Day Two of the Constitutional Con--

In his opening remarks to the convention Yokich said that organizing was all of our jobs. No it isn't. Workers are over their heads in overtime, speed-ups, and multi-tasking. We don't have time to organize outside our shops. We need to organize ourselves to resist the lean production standards and mandatory overtime that porkchoppers support. We need to fight for what rightfully belongs to us, our own jobs.

The Ad. Caucus has cooperated with the boss for their own benefit, squandered union resources, and failed to develop an effective organizing strategy. That's the bottom line. All they have to offer in the way of accountability is blame and excuses.

In the last two decades we lost umpteen times more members to outsourcing than we gained by organizing. We have to organize UAW members to fight back and save their own jobs. Cooperation is a bust. Jointness programs encourage members to cooperate with management and compete with other locals for concessions in direct violation of Article 19, Section 6 of the UAW Constitution.

Secure Employment Level [SEL] touted in each new contract as job security is a boondoggle. The bosses don't honor the SEL agreement and know they aren't expected to. Outsourcing language is worth less than a junk yard dog with no teeth. Jobs are outsourced to non union shops for half the wages. Then, if they are organized, (with the help of our corporate partners) the porkchoppers call it a victory. The Ad. Caucus made a deal with the devil and sold our collective soul.

The salaries of at least a third of UAW International Reps are subsidized by joint funds. Numerous positions at the Human Resource Center and other joint ventures provide further rewards for loyal followers. In exchange for lucrative appointments the Ad. Caucus has agreed to cooperate and help the corporations be more competitive. How do we become more competitive? By eliminating jobs through outsourcing, spin offs, speedups, and multi-tasking. The membership declines while the number of porkchoppers multiply like parasites in a run-off pond.

On day one of the convention Yokich made a big show of asking if any one was against the resolution on social security. Whenever the subject was non controversial, he refused to accept motions to end debate. He said, I have to ask if anybody is against the resolution because that's part of the job. When the topic was controversial, as we shall see, he spoke from the other side of his mouth.

The Hogs Are at the Trough

The second day of the convention opened as usual. We sang songs to the flags of two nations and one occupied territory, Canada, the U.S., and Puerto Rico. Then we prayed. Then we heard a bunch of speeches. Then we were read to. A lot of people put their heads down during the readings, an old habit retained from kindergarten. I'm not a gambler but I could hear the coin swallows calling me ca-ching, ca-ching, ca-ching, an alluring tune for the misbegotten.

The official convention news bulletin declared Unionists Right at Home in Vegas. After compiling the rising fortunes of America's most fabulous town the official UAW News proposed, It's good to know that a good chunk of the money UAW members spend in Las Vegas will find its way into the pockets of other hard-working union members.

It's little wonder that Vegas is the fastest growing union town in America. In a society where industry is irrelevant, workers are dispensable, futures are commodities, options are sold, and the dollar is based on the roulette standard rather than gold, it makes perfect sense that Vegas, a giant mosh pit of low paying service jobs, would offer de-industrialized workers the illusion that we still have a chance.

Win or lose, in Las Vegas we are all players in the sweeping stakes of casino capitalism. Of course, the largest chunk of our money went into the pockets of corpulent thieves.

We proceeded to pass every resolution the Ad. Caucus chose to present. The most surprising was a resolution to transfer \$75 million from our strike fund to the administration. The assets of the Emergency Operations Fund -- including accrued interest and interests on investments -- would be available to finance operations of the International Union in the event the general day-to-day Operating Fund

resources are insufficient to sustain operations due to the effects of a protracted or expensive strike, a series of strikes, or other events posing a serious threat to the economic viability of the International Union.

The Ad. Caucus claimed this proposal was in keeping with the UAW's tradition of sound financial planning and practices.

The Ad. Caucus is notorious for losing money on bad investments from radio stations, airlines, golf courses, and other non union endeavors of questionable merit.

The Wall St. Journal reported that the golf course at Black Lake lost \$201,900 last year. On top of that the UAW loaned UBG Inc., the company that runs the golf course and which lists Steve Yokich as president, another \$225,000 boosting its UBG loans outstanding to about \$1.48 million.

WSJ stated the union's radio business earned a question from an auditor about its ability to continue as a going concern. United Broadcasting Network Inc. reported a \$2.8 million loss last year and has \$13.9 million more in liabilities than in assets. The UAW lost \$14 million in unsecured loans when Pro Air tanked.

This resolution raised a lot of sticky issues. Did the porkchoppers foresee an impending disaster in the near future? One that might interrupt the steady flow of perks and amenities? If there was a protracted strike, shouldn't the families of strikers come first?

What would the \$75 million be invested in? If there was extra money available in the strike fund what about other uses like creating a pension fund for destitute retirees who lost their pensions because of bankruptcies, or IPS workers who never had a pension?

What about the locked out members of Local 2036 who had their strike benefits cut off?

There were twenty resolutions submitted by local unions concerning strike benefits and funds, some were endorsed by five or six locals together. There was a great deal of interest in the strike fund. I expected a serious debate. Apparently

the porkchoppers did to. They were prepared. Lackeys rolled dollies into the aisles. Whatever the dollies contained was concealed by a tarp.

The first delegate rose in support of the resolution. The second delegate called for the question, that is, moved to end debate. Yokich didn't protest. He didn't insist, I have to ask if there is anybody against. Hands up, hands down. The band (yes, there was a live band) kazooed Happy Days Are Here Again.

The dollies, loaded with picket signs, were uncovered and the signs were distributed to delegates who proceeded to form a giant conga line and do a hokey-pokey all around the hall. The signs bore slogans like: IPS Simply the Best: Skilled Work Deserves Skilled Wages: UAW Parts Suppliers Deserve Job Security .

I was dumbstruck. We gave them \$75 million and we didn't even talk about it. I don't have a very highly developed herd instinct. I sat alone in my chair and watched the lemmings race for the cliff. It's so much fun to lose money in Vegas; that's the magic; that's why it's a great union town.

Afterward a reporter told me, it reminded him of Nuremberg. Everyone fell into line, went along with the crowd, and justified their actions by admitting they were just following. This is how a one party, totalitarian state controls the mob.

After the band exhausted Happy Days, they played, Way Down South in Dixie, and then, of all damn things, Roll Out the Barrel the Hogs Are at the Trough.

It was hard to calm down after that. The lemmings were breathless, but the show must go on. We were the highest tribunal in the UAW. We had important tribuning to do. After more speeches by politicians who appeared to enjoy licking Yokich's boots, and more soporific readings by the Committee for Conventional Conformity, we began debate on the Crisis in Manufacturing.

After my speech on the first day I had a firefly's chance in hell of being recognized, but a brother from the writers union, Lee Sustar, picked up the insurgent banner. He rose in opposition to the resolution, Crisis in Manufacturing.

Crisis in Union Democracy

I rise in opposition to this motion, not because I disagree with anything that's in it, or with anything that was said by my brothers and sisters who have spoken. I rise to speak against because it doesn't go far enough. The resolution before us takes up the issue of corporate terrorism. I have had the pleasure of meeting some of the best fighters against corporate terrorism that the UAW has seen in recent years.

I am speaking about the brothers and sisters of Local 2036 in Henderson, Ky who were locked out by Accuride Corporation four years ago after offering to return to work from a strike authorized by then Region 3 Director, Ron Gettelfinger. The corporate terrorism these workers have endured can't be overstated.

Marriages have been broken, members have committed suicide, many are dying because of illnesses they contracted working in this dirty and dangerous plant.

These workers are standing up to a corporation which is a key supplier of truck wheels to two of the most profitable plants in the Big Three. The Janesville, WI GM plant, and the Louisville, KY Ford truck plant.

This strategic parts supplier local came into existence through a strike eighteen years ago. They didn't inherit their UAW jobs. They went out and organized and fought to get them. I'm sorry to report to this convention for those who do not know that in January of this year the members of Local 2036 were cut off for the second time from all strike benefits.

This had immediate repercussions in terms of people's medical costs including one brother who had to go in for major heart surgery just days afterwards. At the same time their charter was removed by the International. The members were informed by a letter sent to management, not to them. If we are going to organize the parts industry, if we are going to defend the jobs that exist in the parts industry, we have to stand with those who fight for the UAW in the parts industry. That means, I argue, restoring the strike benefits and the charter of Local 2036 in Henderson, Ky.

I argue therefore that this motion as strong as it is should be tabled until such time we can have full discussion and a report from the International Executive Board on the decision to remove the benefits and charter of Local 2036 and give us the opportunity to take that position before the convention.

Elizabeth Bunn had been chairing this section of the convention but at this point Yokich pushed her aside. He said: Well, brother, I can see where your heart is and ours is as well. We also have to make decisions as to if you can win or lose. Somewhere along the line after 14 million dollars in strike funds for 140 people on strike down to 14 people. [Yokich seemed stuck on the number 14, but these numbers have no relevance to Local 2036 where over 400 members went on strike. They maintained a picket for four years even after the International cut off strike benefits. The president of Local 2036, Bill Priest, told The Gleaner news reporter about 100 were still depending on the strike fund for medical insurance when Yokich pulled the charter. Maybe he was thinking about the 14 million he dumped at Pro Air.]

Yokich added, Somewhere along the line we had the Big Three vice presidents go to the corporations that they represent. We have put all the pressure that we could humanly possibly put. We don't like losing, but once in a while you do lose a game, once in a while, and there's a group in this union that has taken that and run it against every damn thing we do good in this union. And I will not sit here and let people talk about this union in the way you do.

In strict adherence to the Revised Rules of Robert's Disorder the motion to table was ignored. Elizabeth Bunn asked if anyone wanted to speak in favor of the resolution, Crisis in Manufacturing. A loyal follower responded by calling for the question and the debate ended. Brother Yokich didn't ask if anyone was opposed.

Yokich's spin on Local 2036 was revealing. Cutting your losses at the expense of workers' lives is a corporate value not a union or a human value. Trying to diminish the impact by lying about the number of people effected is also a corporate value. Unionists believe An injury to one is an injury to all. But Yokich implied an injury to some doesn't rate much concern. He asserted that sending UAW vice presidents to their corporate counterparts in the Big Three put all the pressure that we could humanly possibly put.

Ad. Caucus followers act more like corporate handmaidens than unionists. When Navistar attempted to bust a Canadian Auto Workers local CAW president, Buzz Hargrove, said, We are prepared to shut down all of our operations. We are not going to allow them to scab our plants and steal our members' jobs.

This is a real assault on our union. Our problem is not getting our members to put down their tools, our problem is keeping them in the plant until we tell them to come to Chatham. [Labor Notes, August, 2002] The CAW kept scabs out and won a fair contract. The Ad. Caucus never considered mobilizing the membership. Their golf buddies wouldn't approve.

The International did not initiate any solidarity actions on behalf of Local 2036. UAW members were not aware they were mounting scab wheels on trucks.

When the porkchoppers couldn't get any help from their corporate partners they cut off strike benefits to the locked out workers. When the International decided to put the Local under administratorship, Yokich admitted he didn't even know who they supplied.

When they pulled the charter they didn't even inform the members. Instead, Region 3 Director, Terry Thurman, sent a letter to Accuride disclaiming any interest in representing the members.

Yokich's accusation that there's a group in this union that has taken that and run it against every damn thing we do good in this union, is like a drunk blaming a tree for jumping in front of his car.

To be continued.....

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151