

Live Bait & Ammo #35

--Day Two of the Bargaining Con--

On the second day delegates actually got a chance to speak about issues that struck close to home and they ran with it. The recurring theme was outsourcing. Over and over delegates emphasized that outsourcing needed to be a strikeable issue. Gerald Bantam chaired. He had all the enthusiasm of a banana peel.

Outsourcing

Suman Bohm, Local 435: I'm glad the resolution committee decided that outsourcing should be a strikeable issue. Many UAW members have supported this idea for years. I am glad the International is finally giving the idea legitimacy. I support the resolution, but I have some concerns about the language.

The International has always said that the outsourcing language was strong and pro union. But most rank and file members know that the outsourcing language was so full of loopholes that the companies got away with outsourcing all the jobs they wanted.

In my plant we have seen seats, struts, motor line, IP line, outsourced. This was allowed by contract language that was supposedly strong and pro union. I am glad the International supports the right to strike over outsourcing. But I will not be completely happy until I am sure that the new language will not contain the same kind of loopholes that have hurt us in the past.

What kind of muscle do you plan to put behind making outsourcing a strikeable issue? I say this because in the past decade strikes like the one at Caterpillar, and more recently at Accuride, have put the International in the position of supporting strikes that they later backed away from at the expense of workers.

My point is simple: I support the idea of making outsourcing a strikeable issue, but for this demand to be successful the International cannot let workers who strike over outsourcing hang in the wind.

We Told Them Point Blank

Tom Sunday, Local 869: Outsourcing is the critical issue. Daimler wants to outsource all the Tool and Die work. We need to address this issue in national negotiations. We can be competitive. All we need is some support.

Training is the critical issue. We have contractors all over our plant doing work we could be doing, like trouble shooting and warranty work, because our skilled tradesmen haven't been trained. We have hired contract workers to sweep floors, wash walls, and paint while our own people were left home.

This is historically our work. This is deplorable. Back in the 80s when Chrysler wanted to close plants, Mark Step, I remember, took us all out. We picketed other facilities. We picketed Highland Park. We told the corporation, point blank, if they wanted to close any facility like MacGraw Glass etc...that we would strike them at a plant where they were making money.

We need to take that same type of initiative. We need to take them on where we have the bargaining power. So that they don't have the leverage to close plants that don't have enough work.

There's plenty of work for the corporation to bring in. They have outsourced 70% of our work at Daimler. We can bring that work in house and do it in our plant. There's no reason to outsource.

[Nate Gooden claims labor relations at Daimler have never been better. The Detroit UnFree Press reported that 200 union members picketed Solidarity House in August because they felt the UAW was not supporting them in their fight against a plan to close their plant.]

Forced Relocation Hurts Families

Don Swikert, Local 2209: I've been laid off, spun off, and I was finally sold off. However, I was lucky enough to be able to go to another local about an hour away. A lot of our brothers and sisters have not been this lucky. They've left their families, mothers and fathers, and even at times their wives and children, to live in another state.

They've been forced to do this because it is too easy for the companies to sell, close, or relocate. We need to make it very unattractive for the company to close or relocate. We can do this by strong penalties written into our contracts, language that protects our incomes, health care benefits, and especially our retirements.

No Mandatory Overtime

Lou Reinhart, Local 653: GM would just as soon work you till you drop then outsource the work because you couldn't make it back to work the next day.

He said that local union leaders aren't given the training or the information they need to fight outsourcing. I trust the membership. I trust that they are able to make good decisions as long as they are informed and they have the facts.

On reduction of work time he said that local shop committees in an attempt to stave off outsourcing will make an agreement that the members work all available overtime, seven days a week, or lose the work.

All overtime should be voluntary. I strongly support it.

Working overtime is not a solution to outsourcing, it's a prescription for injury, illness, and an early death. We need language that allows us to strike over outsourcing and to refuse overtime in the event our brothers and sisters are laid off indefinitely.

John Dawson, Local 686: If we are serious about reducing the work week, we need to get away from mandatory overtime. It's got to the point in our plant today, where we have people getting disciplined because they do not want to work six days a week.

Mark Farris, Local 600, called for a point of order. He said, I think it's time for a one day general strike in this country. Look at France. When the federal government simply talked about cutting back on social security, hundreds of thousands of workers walked off the job.

A one day general strike is necessary. The old tactics aren't working. The electoral process is too slow. VP Bantam slipped him the banana peel. He said, Brother, you're out of order. Cut the mic. So much for that idea.

The Fate of Spin Offs

Wendy Thompson, president of Local 235, American Axle: We are a spin off from GM, I know that many other plants are moving in that direction. We are concerned that a structural change within the UAW is occurring, and that some of us who are spin offs from GM are being taken out of the GM department.

I feel this indicates to spin off plants that we are not going to maintain the pattern contract, but rather we are being sent off in another direction, and it opens us up to attack.

Right now American Axle is attempting to undermine the pattern contract. Yes, they signed it, but in many ways they do not want to implement what they signed. I think that taking us out of the GM department in the UAW would give them an advantage.

In the grievance procedure they don't care about precedence. They don't care what the umpires have said. They want to set a new precedent and redefine the traditions that have been negotiated in the past.

I believe all spin offs should stay within the same departments so as to indicate to whoever wants to buy any UAW represented plant that we will maintain the pattern contract and our intention is to bring all UAW members up to that standard and not to continue this drive to lower the standards of UAW members.

This is a significant development, a signal that the Ad. Caucus intends to break the pattern for spin offs and make concessions. What happens at American Axle is indicative of what will occur at Delphi, Visteon, and future spin offs.

I advocate that Delphi, Visteon, and American Axle, unite with IPS and form a unified strategy to combat the drive to lower our standards.

The Ford, GM, and Daimler departments at Solidarity House have not fought to protect IPS or spin offs. We are naive if we expect them to act different now. Two tier wage has already been implemented at some Delphi and American Axle plants.

The needs of IPS members have been sacrificed in order to maintain high profits at the Big Three. We are treated like second class members in the UAW. Let's unite IPS, and lead the battle for higher standards throughout the industry.

IPS Members Unite

When I got my chance I pursued my agenda: solidarity for IPS workers.

Brothers and sisters, if you work for Delphi, Visteon, or American Axle you may think you are part of the Big Three, but upcoming negotiations will shatter that illusion. We are no longer part of the elite, we are IPS.

The pressure is on to cut costs. We are slated for two tier wage, benefit cuts, speed-ups, and permanent temps. We must resist this assault on IPS workers.

For years high profits were maintained at the Big Three by outsourcing to low wage suppliers. That phase is over. They have outsourced nearly everything.

Now the Big Three are pressuring suppliers to cut costs further by attacking workers. IPS workers should not have to sacrifice. IPS deserves a raise not a wage cut. IPS workers should be wary of going on strike. Don't get locked out like 2036. If you can't stop production and keep it stopped on your own, don't go out. Stay inside. Work to rule. Workers rule when they work to rule.

IPS needs a unified national strategy that includes Delphi, Visteon, American Axle, Lear, Johnson, Tower, Dana, and every small IPS in between. If one goes out we all go out. Isolated strikes like Local 2036 in Henderson, Ky. are social suicide.

We need to support each other like a real union if we want to survive. We need a partnership with other local unions, not with corporations. IPS needs brothers and sisters in the Big Three to say, we don't handle scab parts.

If UAW members had refused to handle Accuride's scab truck wheels, Local 2036 would have a contract today.

We need cooperation between unions, not cooperation with the boss.

We need (1) a national pattern contract for IPS, (2) an industry wide benefit plan, (3) portable pensions, and (4) preferential hiring for laid off IPS workers. Some say it can't be done.

Let me remind you, they said we'd never get the Eight Hour Day, COLA, 30 & Out, SUB Pay. They said they would never recognize the UAW. Surprise, surprise, surprise.

The best way to organize is to show workers we can fight the boss and win. History has shown the only way to win social and economic justice is to resist, rebel, and revolt. Cooperation with the boss is a bust. Power respects power not punks. National Pattern contract for IPS. IPS workers unite, unite, unite.

Then the resolution committee began reading to us again. I yelled for a point of order and made a motion to dispense with the readings. I heard several people yell support but the motion was ignored.

Then Carl -Never Saw a Concession I Didn't Like- Rapson took over as chair.

Social Security Age Creep

A delegate from Region 1-C whose name and local I couldn't catch said, Under no circumstances should GM or any other UAW represented company be allowed to reduce a retiree's pension, a pension earned through dedication and hard work for these auto companies.

When social security kicks in early retirement supplemental pay should be rolled into the retiree's base pay.

Autoworkers have paid into the social security system all their working lives. We have earned our retirement from the auto companies we are entitled to both checks and no one should be allowed to reduce that benefit.

Government workers and Teamsters have no deductions on their pensions. I submit to you if no deductions on pensions at any age is good enough for them it's good enough for the UAW.

Linda Corrine, Local 2164: Our retirees should be protected from new laws effecting social security age creep. They should not be forced to lock in social security below 80% due to age changes in the law. Our retirees deserve any adjustment that can be made to protect them from these new laws.

This is especially important in the UAW as our pensions are tied into social security unlike Teamsters, Machinists, and other unions whose pension calculations are independent of social security and are not reduced when social security kicks in.

She also said, I was proud to hear President Gettelfinger make this commitment and I quote: 'The UAW will not allow the Big Three to shift the cost of health care to union members. We should not continue to take concessions so that hot shot executives can continue to receive huge bonuses'.

Of course we can all recall at the convention in '99 when Yokich swore he would make GM retain a 51% share of Delphi.

Rapson called on me. I couldn't believe it, twice in one day.

Parity from Top Floor to Shop Floor

In 1999 we were told that the UAW held the line on health care takeaways. A year later we got co-pays. We are always told the UAW held the line, but each new contract includes COLA diversion, and COLA diversion is an insurance payment.

The corporations tell us that they don't have enough money and that we need to reduce the cost of health care. According to GM's proxy statement, VEBA, a benefits trust fund, decreased by a billion dollars because of capital expenditures: \$493 million for a stake in Suzuki and \$500 million for an equity injection into GMAC.

The corporation used our benefits fund for capital investments. There's your COLA diversion. Now they claim there isn't enough money for health care. The money is there and they owe it to us.

UAW members deserve a single payer health care plan just like the International has. We don't want our medical decisions made by a bean counting HMO. We want Blue Cross just like the International has. With 100% reimbursement just like the International has.

The corporations say they can't afford to pay COLA on pensions. But nineteen cents for every hour worked goes into joint funds, plus the overtime penalty which can be as much as five dollars per hour. There are hundreds of millions of dollars in the reservoir funds. These funds are part of our collective bargaining agreement.

The money could be used for COLA on pensions instead of soft jobs for union cronies. The money could be used to ensure our retirement package would include health insurance without escalating co-pays, instead of monuments to jointness.

The money is there and they owe it to us.

The International staff has COLA on pensions and special supplements to guard against social security age creep. We want the same protections. Like Dave Yettaw always said, If it's good for the top floor, it's good for the shop floor.

To be continued.....

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151