

UAW Convention Delegation Minority Report

By Mike Parker, delegate
6/20/06

A majority of the 1700 delegation seems to want a report that limits itself to just the factual items we can all agree on. I have contributed to that part and am willing to sign such a report with others. But I do not agree that that kind of report is sufficient or even the most important information we can give our membership.

I believe the membership deserves a frank report of what happened at the convention behind the official activities because our future very much depends on the strength and policies of our union. If you just wanted a straight report of the official acts and speeches at the convention you could have sent a tape recorder instead of a large delegation and saved a lot of money.

I believe that the membership is correctly concerned about the future of the UAW, and the policies and direction of the International leadership.

The importance of the convention is not only what happens in the official record, but what does not happen. As the *New York Times* aptly reported, "Speaking to delegates here last week, Mr. Woodcock's widow, Sharon, reminded them of one of her late husband's favorite mottoes: 'What was not said was as important as what was said.'"

Our union and everything we have fought for and won are now under assault by the major corporations. Worse, the media and its stories seem to buy the line of the corporations and help to isolate us. Instead of the public seeing the corporations making decisions to bloat their profits, the press carries through the corporate line that it is we who are greedy, self-serving workers who prevent our companies from being "competitive."

The problem with our UAW leadership is that they have adopted a partnership strategy that keeps them from organizing a fight against the corporations. Thus the UAW has organized no fight against Delphi and has focused its efforts on increasing the number of buy-outs from Delphi and GM. Is it any wonder that most of the public does not

understand that Delphi is highly profitable and that this bankruptcy is a way to destroy good union contracts and move jobs to more profitable plants in other countries?

During the convention, the media leaked a Ford document showing that its "forward" strategy was to close plants in the US and build in Mexico. Instead of using the convention to give a response, the leadership issued a "no comment" claiming no first-hand knowledge. But surely that knowledge was available given our "partnership" with Ford. Or at least a phone call could have gotten the facts. If not, then the partnership is a fraud and the leadership should have said so. Alternatively, perhaps Ford was just waiting until after the convention so as not to embarrass its UAW partners. There is no "good" explanation.

The convention refused to discuss, let alone organize, a direct response to the current corporate assault on our contracts, the retiree takeaways, the shelf agreements at Chrysler, or Delphi's union-busting. No resolutions or constitutional amendments that were submitted on these subjects were reported out. Three attempts to bring these issues to the floor were soundly defeated.

The convention ran according to its script. There were no unexpected decisions.

Evaluation of the Convention

The convention can best be summed up in a conversation I overheard while walking the long hallway to the convention center.

One delegate to another: A reporter came up to me and asked me what I felt about Ron's downbeat report. I said it wasn't downbeat—he was just stating the problems and what we have to change to deal with them. Then the reporter asked, "what changes are those?" You know, I couldn't think of anything. I finally said something about organizing, but I really don't have an answer.

Despite the positive opening by President Gettlefinger's state of the union report that seemed to call for a frank discussion, the convention completely closed up afterwards.

Shortly afterward, I introduced an amendment to the agenda calling for the Tuesday morning session to address the corporate attacks on our current contracts such as the Shelf agreement at Trenton and the attacks on Delphi and other parts companies. I argued that the corporations are attacking our contracts now. They are not waiting until next year and by next year we will have lost major union rights. The motion was overwhelmingly defeated. Gettlefinger's call in his initial speech to "think creatively," contrasted with several speakers reading from the Administration Caucus handout, repeating the

What Your Delegates Did

You deserve to know what your delegates -- your representatives -- did at the convention so you can hold them accountable.

Mike Parker and Mike Yanoulakis did not support the Administration Caucus and did not attend their meetings. We helped write and distribute leaflets and Mike Parker was able to speak on the floor twice challenging the direction of the union. Parker voted to bring the issues of the companies' assault on workers and the retiree rights amendment to the floor. Yano, as an alternate, could not speak or vote but spent a lot of time talking to delegates about these issues.

The full delegate report with more information about the official acts of the convention is also available at

www.rts-tech.com/meatballs)

mantra that the rules have worked for us for 30 years and we should trust our rules committee. Others argued that we should wait until the bargaining convention next year.

Some delegates, particularly first-time delegates from small locals, did get a lot out of the convention. The sheer numbers of union people together, the sense of power, purpose and militancy that was at least talked, gave hope to people who are isolated or in battles in weak union areas. On the other hand, more experienced delegates recognized that the leadership of the union is very thin, was offering no redirection for the union, and seemed to lack the vision required to carry the union through the next period. There were several reasons for this:

1. The convention is run according to a script that is determined and tightly enforced by the Administration Caucus. The caucus is directed by the International Executive Board. Caucus members are asked to pledge support to caucus candidates and support the caucus on all convention issues including such things as not "calling resolutions from locals out from committee" to be discussed on the floor.
2. Constitutional amendments proposed by the locals must be sent in weeks in advance, and then for the most part are ignored by the Constitution Committee. On the other hand, the Constitution Committee is under no restriction and as a practice only makes known its amendments at the same time they are presented to the floor for discussion and a vote. Thus there is no time to research or seriously consider or draft an alternative to any substantial constitutional amendment. The very complicated one that diverts strike fund money, for example, may send a signal that we are not preparing for a battle with Delphi or any of the Big Three. The use of the diverted money was vague. It appears mostly to keep the same organization with fewer members but was there anything new? Was the right balance of Local and International portion achieved? Although one delegate did raise some of these questions, it was not possible to have serious discussion before voting on it.
3. The Resolutions Committee and Constitution Committee do not feel it necessary to report out even popular resolutions from the Locals. Instead they report out only what the leadership wants. The rules make it practically impossible to get a resolution called out from committee and that is reinforced by Administration Caucus pressure on delegates. So, it was not possible to even get a discussion and vote on direct election of International Officers, retiree vote on retiree issues, etc.
4. The balance sheet on democratic procedures has entries on both sides.

On the plus side, the union allowed a meeting room for those who wanted to take up the corporate attacks. For the most they did not hinder leaflet distribution. On the other hand, the International Reps, who are all part of the Administration Caucus, leaned heavily on delegates who did not toe the official line.

Delegates started a shameful practice of yelling out NO anytime the chair would ask if anyone was opposed to a motion. The intensity of this "NO" chorus increased as the convention went along. On the last day, during the resolution on Support our Troops, although in full support of what was in the resolution, I took the floor to speak in opposition. This was necessary, under the rules, to get an amendment to *strengthen* the resolution (to make clear that "as quickly as possible" should

New International Officers

There were no contests for any offices and the ones "elected by acclamation" were the ones selected months earlier by the Administration Caucus and announced then in the press. 1992 was the last year there were any challenges for International officers.

The International Executive Board will now be

Ron Gettelfinger, President,

Elizabeth Bunn, Secy Treas (Finances, TOPS organizing, Women's Dept.)

General Holiefield (Chrysler, Heavy Truck, General Dynamics)

Bob King (Ford, Independents, Parts, Suppliers and Severstal (formerly Rouge Steel))

Cal Rapson (GM, Delphi, Vets)

Jimmy Settles (Ag Imp, Aerospace, Transplants, American Axle, Guide, TOPS servicing)

Terry Thurman (Organizing)

And the elected Regional Directors

Joe Peters was reelected Director from our own Region 1. In his acceptance speech to the Regional Caucus he pointedly talked about how this region was going to work hard to protect wages, retirees and the basic trades.

Note that delegates do not get to vote for "assignments" (such as who will head the Chrysler Department). The major assignments shown in parentheses above were announced after the Convention.

While many Locals submitted a Constitutional amendment for direct election of our officers by the membership. The Constitution Committee never brought it to the floor.

mean immediately, not when George Bush was done using the troops as political fodder).

I also spoke against the practice of shouting "NO" when opposition was called for, arguing that the UAW stood for democracy in the workplace and society. I said that democracy is important for the strength of the union and that giving people "voice" counts most when they disagree with those in power. I got a lot of support from the body and the practice subsided. Later on, President Gettelfinger took the podium and defended the right of opposing arguments. As a result the "NO" cries stopped entirely.

On the plus side, the past cultish practice of putting Regional Directors' names on every shirt and jacket and putting the IEB officers' names on the briefcases was eliminated. On the other hand, perhaps out of boredom with the script, every delegate would identify him/herself by adding the name and some ritual praise of their regional director: "And I have the best best best best best regional director...[name] in the whole union" It was all good-natured, but it began to be tedious and began to feel like emphasis on cult of the personality rather than union strength.

Non-Scripted Parts of the Convention.

In addition to the attempt to change the agenda described above, there were two times delegates attempted to bring substantial issues before the convention. One was the right for

retirees to vote on contracts that take away benefits that were promised to them. The issue of retiree votes is complicated both legally and organizationally. But regardless of how one feels, given the renegotiation of contracts in the past year, it deserved to be discussed at the convention.

Also, given what is going on now, the Convention was amazingly silent about the attack on Delphi workers. A Delphi worker attempted to bring the issue up to the Convention, but nothing changed the script. (See page 4)

Off the Floor Activity

The convention is important not only for what happens in the official records but for the networking and discussions that take place. It is the opportunity to talk with members from other Chrysler plants and other plants facing similar problems. We found, for example, that the recent shelf agreements at the Chrysler plants go far deeper than those at similar plants at Ford and GM and that Ford is now using the Chrysler Department GEMA contract for benchmarking.

We were also able to find resources for various problems we face on the job through contact with International staff, or members from other Locals.

Some of us participated in trying to get the convention to address the issue of whipsawing of plants, and the Delphi attack.

At the beginning of the convention we circulated a leaflet signed by 32 delegates, alternates, and local officers attending the convention, including Mike Parker, Mike Yanoulakis, and Bill Parker, calling for the Convention to take up these issues, and we held a public meeting at the Convention to further explain how these threaten our union.

The leaflet was well received and privately a lot of delegates gave us encouragement and support, but they were hesitant to do it publicly. As one said, "I am overloaded in the plant, I just can not take the additional hassle that [public support] will bring me from the International."

Counter Attacks

International reps and others criticized people who signed the leaflet, saying that they were being duped by Soldiers of Solidarity because it was also signed by one of the leaders of Soldiers of Solidarity, Delphi worker and delegate Gregg Shotwell.

First, it is classic guilt by association politics that has no place in the UAW or any democratic group. More to the point, it is a smear of a good unionist.

Let me make it clear. So far as I know there are no Soldiers of Solidarity members in 1700. SOS arose in response to the Delphi assault on its workers. The UAW leadership failed to provide leadership, and some Delphi workers courageously stepped in to fill the void. Gregg Shotwell is a Delphi worker who has spent his own time and money to try to rally and organize a resistance. The UAW leadership should have embraced Shotwell and others like him. As the New York Times (6/18) said about Delphi:

...Delphi outmaneuvered the U.A.W. by filing for bankruptcy protection. Delphi's chief executive, Robert S.

Retiree Concessions & Rights

Background. Recently the GM and Ford contracts were reopened to make substantial changes with the effect of increasing retiree health care costs and changing company obligations. At Ford the contract barely passed. Several Locals submitted resolutions to the Convention calling for an amendment to the constitution that would provide retirees the right to vote "when the contract being considered includes any takeaways from the pension, healthcare or other benefits retirees were promised when they retired." The Constitution Committee refused to report out any amendments on the topic.

Fellow delegates. I am Gary Walkowicz from Local 600. My membership passed a resolution to change the constitution to give the right to retirees to vote on any contract that would take away rights they have in their retirement.

Let me repeat. The resolution would give retirees that right only on contracts that would take away rights or benefits. Let me just say, I support calling out this resolution, because of circumstances that affect our retirees at Ford.

As people know, our contract was re-opened and re-negotiated and as a result, not only are active workers' raises being deferred, but retirees are now being asked to pay for their health care premiums and increased co-pays.

Worst of all, these premiums are now made dependent on a VEBA. Which means their health care is no longer guaranteed. As people may or may not be aware, the VEBA program has been negotiated at other locations, and those VEBA trusts have run out and the full cost of health care premiums has fallen on the backs of retirees.

I say this is wrong. I say we should not be giving up what we have fought for all these years in pensions and health care. To take that away from retirees without giving them the right to vote is wrong.

I believe this body should call forth from the committee this resolution and have a discussion to give our retirees the right to vote so they can go forward and know that their rights cannot be taken away from them without them having a chance to have their say.

I believe retirees have earned that right.

I am asking the body to vote to call forth from the committee, the resolution that can be found on page 37 of your book. I propose that this resolution be called out of committee for discussion by the body. Thank you.

[207 votes were required to call the resolution out of committee. Brother Walkowicz's motion received 12 votes as counted by the chair.]

Miller Jr., went almost unchallenged in his attacks on U.A. W. wage and benefit rates and drew a wide audience for his insistence on deep cuts. Mr Gettelfinger chose to reply to critiques primarily in a press release, and the UAW offered a more robust response **only after workers in Michigan and Ohio began protesting against any cuts.** (emphasis added)

Instead the UAW leadership repeated the pattern of the recent past—they treated union dissidents as bigger enemies than the corporations which are crushing the union.

It is not necessary to agree with everything Gregg Shotwell or any other rank and file union leader has to say to recognize the contribution they do make and understand that in many ways they represent the kind of spirit and dedication which can rebuild this union

As should be clear from this report, I believe that a fundamental problem in this union is that it is a one-party system which tightly controls everything that happens officially in the union above the Local level. It is not that any particular rules are necessarily undemocratic. But the rules are combined with this one-party system that maintains its power through the appointment power of the International and the joint programs.

For example, the union has not had a contested election for the International officers since 1992. No one runs because they see no chance of getting elected at the convention, and opposition to the Administration Caucus can make life difficult for local officers and representatives.

Most delegates are pledged to the Administration Caucus before even going to the convention and seeing whether there are alternative candidates. Of course, this discourages alternative candidates from putting themselves forward. It becomes a vicious circle and new leadership and holding the old leadership accountable through elections becomes even more distant.

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UAW in Las Vegas?

Anti-union forces say to workers we are trying to organize, “Why join a union? All it will accomplish is to take your dues money and pay for union leaders to party in Vegas.”

Consider an alternative. Supposing the UAW held its convention near a plant or plants we are trying to organize, say within easy reach of the Toyota plant in Kentucky. Then we could invite workers from the Toyota plant to see the UAW for itself, to meet real UAW members and leaders, to see how the UAW works. They could get a sense of the resources and the power of the union.

It would probably also have a good effect on the UAW, to look at its convention procedures from the point of view of workers deciding whether or not to join.

My own personal feeling is that Las Vegas symbolizes what is worst about this society. It is a city that makes huge profits by encouraging gambling addiction. I for one find it depressing to see row after row of people feeding slots knowing that most can not afford to be losing that money in the hopes that, against the odds, luck will strike and their lives will be transformed.

For the record my limit was \$10, I quit as soon as I was \$3.00 ahead. There are some great, if expensive, shows in Vegas. I saw Cirque Du Soleil, KA the night the Convention ended. It was phenomenal. Highly recommended. But that is no reason to hold our union convention there.

Call for Action against Delphi

Background: Delphi is declaring bankruptcy only for its US plants even while its non-US plants are raking in profits. Clearly Delphi is a profitable company using technical bankruptcy as a means to destroy its labor contracts and move work overseas. Many unionists recognize that Delphi is the future pattern for all of us.

Prior to the convention many locals sent in resolutions calling for strong UAW action against Delphi to defend our contracts including an industry-wide or general strike. The resolutions committee chose not to report out any of these resolutions.

On the first day of the convention a delegate, moved to amend the agenda of the convention to allow discussion and resolutions in response to the corporate attacks. This motion was voted down, with delegates arguing that it should wait until the bargaining convention next year.

On the second day, Gregg Shotwell, a Delphi worker, Local 2151, made the following remarks on the Resolution on Outsourcing. There was applause but the convention took no action.

It's not enough to talk the talk. We have to walk the walk.

In 1999 GM executed the largest outsourcing scheme in UAW history. They not only outsourced our work, they transferred our pensions from GM to Delphi.

We didn't fight. We chose to negotiate. We failed. Now they are coming to finish the job.

For those of us at Delphi it feels like we are in the Alamo. We are surrounded and they are coming to finish us off.

Every so often we get a message. Some workers, some hostages, may be released. Many who leave are going under duress. They aren't ready, or they are going out on the 50 and 10 [Fifty years old and at least ten years pension credit] and it isn't enough.

I said to one brother, “it's not enough. How are you going to make it?” “My wife has cancer,” he said. “I have to go.” The rest of us must stay and fight. Some of us, have no choice.

Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, Delphi is a line in the sand. What happens at Delphi is the future of the UAW.

Delphi workers are in the Alamo, and we are listening for the cavalry. But we don't hear the boots on the pavement.

We need to hear boots on the pavement. We need a one day general strike for Delphi workers just like the immigrant workers. If immigrants could organize a national day of solidarity, why can't the UAW?

Delphi workers feel threatened. We feel isolated.

I call on this convention to stand up for Delphi workers. I call on this convention to show their support and solidarity with Delphi workers.