

Fixing The Broken Compass

Statement of Jerry Tucker, former UAW International Executive Board Member, on Upcoming UAW Convention Presidential Election Contest

An election challenge for the top office of the UAW International Union---now that's a rare event! Even more rare is the possibility of a UAW Constitutional Convention where an actual debate, or principled discussion on the direction of the union can occur. Constitutionally, the union's quadrennial Convention is supposed to be the organization's highest authority. Delegates assembled are in charge---or so the By-laws say. History tells a different story.

With the announcement of rank & file Ford worker Gary Walkowicz, a bargaining committeeman at a Local 600 unit in Greater Detroit, that he will be a candidate for the UAW International Union Presidency, that all too rare, but democratically therapeutic event is now likely to occur. For a shrunken, battered union rank and file, a contest featuring the opportunity to foster a debate on the ruling administration's policies and the resulting sorely unmet needs of the membership, should be a very welcome thing. The 17-year Cicada birth cycle occurs more often than a real election at a UAW Convention.

Our members in the domestic auto industry have been making wave after wave of union leadership promoted concessions to ruthless, irresponsible corporations. And, today we have little other than an industrial landscape of empty, idle plants, ridiculous two-tier wage schemes, busted family budgets, gripping retirement health care and pension insecurity, to show for it. The last challenge to the union's leadership was 18 years ago. It fell to me, at that particular time, to offer the alternative. That challenge raised fundamental questions about the course the union leadership had set, which would ultimately represent tar-baby like complicity with those irresponsible corporate policies. A renew of the challenge is at hand.

Eighteen years is a long time to go without having a critical debate on the direction and purpose of what is billed as a 'membership owned' union. Delegates to the upcoming Convention should celebrate the occasion. Even with the election outcome in little doubt, they should brush-up on all their largely unexpressed fears and turn this Convention into no-holds barred grievance meeting on the UAW's downward spiral and misdirected allegiance to employers who care only about the bottom-line and not the lives and welfare of workers and make the Cobo Hall proceedings a dynamic, positive exercise in true democratic deliberation and debate.

Gary Walkowicz, whose voice spoke truth to power so eloquently during the Ford Contract reopener rejection vote, should command both the respect of his delegate brothers and sisters who are being given this rare opportunity lend their own voices to the reformation of a once proud union sorely in need of a new direction.

Jerry Tucker
jtuckernd@sbcglobal.net
314-968-5534