

Convention Report

Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome back! We made it through a rough year and 2011 will also be challenging! Sunday Jan. 9th, 1:30 pm to 3 pm rank and file autoworkers will have an information picket line for jobs at decent pay & against global whipsawing in front of Cobo Hall at the Auto Show. We want to give reporters from around the world a chance to get viewpoints from autoworkers. Hope to see you there!

I attended the UAW Constitutional Convention in Detroit last June as the Alternate Delegate for the Local 22 AAM/ARAMARK/VITEC/NURSES GROUPS. I was not on the Convention floor, but was able to observe from the sitting area in the back that was open to all interested members. I will be doing so again at the upcoming Bargaining Convention in March.

Organizing Demonstrations for Social Justice

Since his election in June, President Bob King has emphasized the need for all members to be mobilized into mass demonstrations around our concerns as working people. This is important with the corporations and the banks becoming more and more powerful and affecting every area of our lives. At the Convention, Pres. King led delegates on a march for economic justice to Chase Bank on Woodward with Teamsters, AFSCME, SEIU also participating. King has warned Chase that if they do not put a moratorium on foreclosures, he may withdraw the \$300 million the UAW has at the bank.

On Aug. 28th, the UAW helped build the “Jobs, Justice and Peace” march in Detroit that I attended. Many UAW members went to the AFL-CIO/NAACP demonstration in Washington, D.C. on October 2nd. I was on one of the 10 buses that Region 1 sent to the action. I also attended the rally at the School of the Americas in Georgia to protest the U.S. military training to Latin American military officers. For example, the coup in Honduras was led by one of the officers who attended the school. Other officers have been involved in killing trade unionists in Columbia and Honduras. I am glad the UAW had a presence at all of these rallies—we need to speak out on a wide range of issues that affect us.

Today the UAW membership stands at 355,000 but if we reach out to the community, to other workers, and to the unemployed, our numbers can multiply. The truth is that we aren't going to win anything without strong community support. If we are involved in supporting community issues, our neighbors and friends will support us in our struggles.

A Platform and a Convention in a Time of Crisis

Last year Local 22 passed a number of important resolutions to send to the Constitutional Convention. These included:

1) *Rebuild a Fighting Union* – We need to stand united in solidarity to eliminate the two-tier wage structure, to end the practice of whipsawing, to stop mass layoffs and plant closings, and to reverse the overall concessionary trend that stems from the disastrous strategy of promoting competitiveness.

2) *Right to a Job* – Let's reopen our closed plants. Why not a massive retooling like what occurred at the beginning and end of World War II? The reopened plants could build needed mass transit, light rail, buses as well as electric cars and renewable - non-fossil - energy use

(including wind and hydraulic turbines, solar panels, etc)? Last year less than 5,000 buses were manufactured in the United States!

3) *One Member One Vote for International Officers* to encourage more membership participation to create a more democratic, and therefore stronger, union.

4) *Single Payer Health Care for All*— The new health care bill has no mechanism to control costs, which continue to skyrocket. Healthcare benefits for active workers are two-tiered and stingy, with corporations clamoring for more cuts. VEBA is underfunded, and already eye and dental benefits for retirees have been eliminated.

5) *UAW Unification with the USWA and the CAW*, the combined membership of the three unions would total close to 1½ million members, the equivalent of the UAW's membership totals at its peak in 1979, and would represent a more powerful political force in both collective bargaining and in the political arena.

None of these resolutions made it to the floor for discussion or a vote. Nor were there resolutions from any other local discussed or voted on. The Administration Caucus—that controls the union apparatus—would only allow the resolutions that they wrote to be brought to the floor.

In fact, the democratic process was even worse than previous conventions. Fundamental to union democracy is the free circulation of literature. In the past, I, along with others, have handed out literature on the convention floor and elsewhere. This time, when I handed out a leaflet outside the hall, an appointed staff person followed me around, telling people not to take my leaflet! When I attempted to enter the hall, they wanted to search my briefcase! (I refused, saying they had no right to check my handbag if they weren't checking everyone's and eventually I was allowed in.)

What was the reason for tightening up on the circulation of leaflets? For the first time in 18 years someone was running against the Administration Caucus's candidate for president. Gary Walkowicz, Shop Committeeperson, Ford Rouge Truck Plant, L. 600, a leader in the vote no campaign against concessions said he would throw his cap into the presidential ring to be a vote against concessions. In the fall of '09, Ford workers overwhelmingly rejected reopening the Contract to freeze the already scandalously low new hire wage and to give up the right to strike until 2015.

The Administration Caucus has such tight control within the UAW that the democratic process was strangled at the Convention. Caucus members created an atmosphere where no one better "dare" run against the Administration Caucus's presidential candidate!

At the Convention, I was an enthusiastic supporter of Gary's. I know how heavy the harassment can be since I was a member of New Directions which "dared" run Jerry Tucker for President. Tucker showed locals in the Midwest how to effectively oppose concessions through work-to-rule campaigns.

At the Constitutional Convention I was very encouraged by the delegate support for Gary Walkowicz. Most were new workers, some working at lower-tier wages. For many years, the overwhelming majority of the convention delegates were too intimidated to go to an independent meeting during conventions. The turn out this year was very exciting! Young people agreed with Ford workers who said: enough is enough, we draw the line on concessions.

When Bob King won more than 50% of the delegate vote, he was declared the victor. Then the chair announced that unless a delegate went up to the microphone and publicly announced he/she was voting for Walkowicz, all votes would be recorded for King. In a hall with 1,000 delegates, only one mike was left open. Therefore each delegate voting for Gary was forced to go through a gauntlet of harassment from appointed officials.

I can't tell you how proud I was of the delegates who had the guts to walk up and cast their vote for Gary. It was also impressive that some delegates were won over to supporting Gary right at the convention.

Why More Concessions?

GM workers at L. 23, a Metal Fab plant in Indianapolis were given notice that the plant would be closing in 2011. Then JD Norman, a company that has been around less than a decade, stepped up last year and said they'd like to buy the plant but didn't want the successor clause. The CEO wanted the GM workers to stay, but at half pay and without many work rules. UAW Local 23 voted not to reopen the contract.

In violation of the UAW Constitution, International officers went in and negotiated and informed the Local that there would be an informational meeting and another vote. But when they showed up at the meeting, the membership demanded that they leave. No second vote occurred. Then the CEO took out a full-page ad in the Indianapolis papers and called for workers and their families to meet with him—but still not accepting the successor clause. Even the governor of the state weighed in, saying that half pay was better than no job at all, and he certainly wasn't going to allow any of them to collect unemployment benefits!

International officers decided to go over the heads of the Local's Executive Board, Shop and Election Committees and announced there would be an unheard of mail-in ballot, supervised by the American Arbitration Association. The membership considered this illegal but over 400 brought their ballots to the union hall and videotaped themselves voting no to assure a fair vote. The AAA announced the vote the following week: 457 no, 96 yes. Almost every week Local 23 members are transferring to other plants—and for many this is the third or fourth move they have been forced to make in order to protect their jobs and their benefits.

In 1994 GM sold five of its plants to American Axle. The Union did not challenge the sale when we went "on the block" although I organized a picket against the sale at the old GM headquarters. UAW reps told us, "Don't worry, we'll negotiate the Pattern!" We had a successor clause – so when Dick Dauch bought the plant, he bought the contract!

We had two contracts before management came up with two-tier wages for the new hires. We defeated it at Local 235, but at other locals the membership was scared and it passed. The next time around Dick Dauch was prepared, and the Union wasn't. We lost an 87-day union-busting strike.

Now when a company wants to buy a GM Plant like in Indianapolis, they say "Forget the successor clause." with the UAW's OK. So GM bought back Saginaw Delphi only to open up the contract and terrorize the workers into making enormous concessions! When the membership voted it down the first time, they were forced to vote again – this time sweetening the concessions with a buy-down bonus. The Plant has been sold to a Chinese corporation, and profits are booming.

In November, L. 5960 told the members at Lake Orion for the first time that 40% of the workforce would come back at \$14 an hour. This wage change had not been voted on during the re-opener that occurred during the bailout. The International said because they had agreed to an "innovative" agreement, they were not entitled to vote on the wage cut. This decision is being protested by rank and file members who organized a rally with 250 people at Solidarity House in October. Meanwhile long-term workers are being pressured to retire and workers with less than 11 years seniority are being forced to transfer to other GM Plants on two weeks' notice.

Now Bob King has come out in support of the U.S.-South Korean Free Trade Agreement, which is just another NAFTA. *We do not need another NAFTA!* A petition will be circulated opposing the Agreement at the Auto Show Rally at Cobo Hall Sun., Jan. 9th, 1:30 pm-3 pm. Hope to see you there! If you would like copies of their petition to circulate in the plant, contact me, Wendy Thompson, at: h. 313-892-7974, c. 313-215-7672, WThomp4490@aol.com.

Wendy Thompson, Alternate Delegate Local 22 AAM/ARAMARK/VITEC/NURSES GROUPS, former President, L. 235, American Axle