

Sunday, January 29, 2012

We are the answer!

Tom Laney

"Isn't it time to revolt against all the dog-eat-dog, company unionism that has nearly saturated our plants over the past 20 years? YES! It is time to start acting like a real union again!

The modernist uaw leaders have it all wrong. (I spell the "new uaw" in lower case because it's not worthy of our history.)

Competition against ourselves doesn't work for us. The "new uaw" reps pound away with a very Big Lie:

That the new uaw's "reality," the uaw's "real world," of worker against worker benefits the common man and woman. In fact, dog-eat-dog has destroyed our locals, union, towns and country. These new anti-worker, anti-community leaders place the blame for the uaw's weakness on us, the general membership, because we don't support our leaders.

This view is wrong. Democracy, Solidarity, Love of the Common Good and the necessity willingness to battle in The Good Fight is the true union philosophy.

True Unions wage the eternal Good Fight for the Good Society where we have Good Jobs for All.

Corporate competitive values—greed, isolation, dog eat dog—will never replace real unionism. They only define uaw sellouts and uaw company unionism. Adopting the corporate competitive agenda means undermining everything unions stand for. It means racing to the bottom against other autoworkers who ought to be our friends. It means conceding everything the real UAW ever fought for. The extension of this competitive view is that finally, the "winner" of all this dog-eat-dog will have nothing left that's union.

The new uaw is a sham. It's thrown away the values of workers for corporate values. It is a company union more interested in speeding workers up than slowing them down.

Its contracts put local unions into dog-eat-dog competition which divides locals and erodes all the hard-fought gains of other generations.

As the uaw moved towards company unionism in the late 70's, union members all over the country fought to retain shop floor unionism, fair job pace and the entire union floor culture that made life on the line much more livable than it is today.

The uaw attacked shop floor unionism with favoritism, appointed jobs and fear. Lots of fear. "Do the work or they'll close the plant," we heard often.

It attacked seniority because seniority is the cornerstone of shop-floor unionism and shop-floor unionism does not allow speed-up and job cuts.

It attacked the generational unity between workers with wage tiers for new hires and cushy jobs—that should go to senior workers or be filled by election—for their friends.

The fact is, most union members still hold the same principles and values that formed unions in the first place.

Good people see mutual support, friendship, solidarity, equality and democracy as the things they value most about their family, social and work lives. You can prove this by just looking around your job.

There are people circulating get-well cards for sick, or more likely, work-injured co-workers.

There are people welding retirement boxes for folks who are finally getting out.

There's someone listening to a friend talk about a family member who's ill and consoling them better than any professional counselor.

Women telling racers to slow down and let the foreman worry about the extra work.

There's a guy with an arm on a buddy's shoulder who just lost a loved one. A teary-eyed tradesman circulating a card for a worker we lost.

Someone showing off pictures of the new baby. There are the heat merchants riding the Packer fans.

There's coffee and cakes and pizzas and smorgasbords. There are the deepest and most profound friendships in which autoworkers share their most difficult times and happiest moments.

And there are always people standing up to the boss, taking a friend's side or defending a union right. It has always been this way.

It will always be this way because that is the way most people really are.

With all our problems and confused company unionists you can still see friends all over the place. This is the real union.

These values of friendship and solidarity have been under organized attack for a generation and have taken some hits for sure. But these values used to run the shop floor and can again if we battle for them. These values at one time made it nearly impossible for the company to cut out jobs.

It is not that way now but it should be and will be whenever we see the uaw for what it's become and begin to organize ourselves plant to plant.

THE UNION LIVES!

The job. This is where the union is despite 20 years of the most intense work and huge expenditures by the company and the new company uaw to persuade us that we should not be friends but enemies &

competitors -

Not mutual supporters but individuals looking out for No. 1.

Not job fighters but doormats.

Not extenders of unionism but serfs in the new uaw's feudal system.

A long time ago the friendships of ordinary autoworkers led to the organization of the real UAW.

The real UAW cut its teeth on removing wages and working conditions from competition, fighting speedup, running slowdowns, sit-downs and strikes to win contracts that were the envy of workers around the world.

Its politics were anti-corporate and pro-worker. The drive was for the full-employment economy with good union jobs for everyone.

Real unions take the fear out of standing up to powerful, greedy corporations. Strength in numbers, solidarity were the watch words of the real UAW.

The new uaw put the fear back in. Speed-up and work injury skyrocketed. Jobs were cut. Plants closed. Work was de-unionized. Strikes were discouraged by insuring that workers who fought back lost.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

The only people who can organize us again are real autoworkers.

All the uaw's institutions, the conventions, councils, sub-councils have become lessons in thought control, places where the deal's already done, places where good reps go to be laughed at, ignored, disappointed, disparaged and defeated. We are never going to win there.

So where could we win? To win we need to link the good union folks across our plant on every shift. Everyone would be encouraged if they'd just look for unionism in all the supportive things autoworkers do for each other everyday.

That's where the hope is. That's where we can get the confidence we need to act union.

Every job fight should be supported.

Every good job should be defended.

Every bad job placed in the strikable grievance procedure.

Every attack by the company, every move by the uaw should be reported to the entire membership.

NO ONE FIGHTS ALONE!

Some years ago, Ricky Brown suggested we put real autoworkers on the road to other plants to talk to other real autoworkers about solidarity.

If we came to work one day and saw Kansas City workers outside our doors asking for help, what would we do?

I think most of us would want to help them. They would most likely want to help us.

A simple message like, "We are 10 chassis frame-line workers sent here by our co-workers to appeal to you to stop the competition between our plants.

We appeal to you for friendship and solidarity.

We are here to unite everyone to keep all our plants open. Please help us find a way to do that. We'll be here at the end of your shifts to talk. This is the way our union was started.

It is the way to start a national union conversation about how we can work together again, how we can raise wages for all new hires, stop favoritism, protect union work rules and work pace, and renew the union culture that should run our plant floors.

It is the way to step outside the competitive box the uaw/Ford folks put us in.

It is the way to give people hope.

It is the way to give people confidence in each other.

It is the only way to start acting like a union again.

It is the way to a society based in friendship and democracy where everyone gets a good job."

Tom Laney

--