

UAW RANK AND FILE LEADERS SPEAK

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The meeting was packed from wall to wall with autoworkers. The air was filled with all sorts of ideas and differing opinions. The real problems of the workers were on the agenda. The people were deciding the direction that their union would take. The workers controlled the locals. This was the way the UAW worked in the early days. Today things are much different. Today the bureaucrats in regional offices and UAW headquarters control the union.

So spoke Pete Kelly, co-chairperson of the Coalition for a Good Contract, in his opening remarks to 100 autoworkers from Budd's Red Lion and Hunting Park plants, and from ITE, GM and Ford plants in the Region 9 area.

The Blue Ribbon Group, a rank and file organization at the Red Lion plant, UAW local 92, organized this event to kick off the struggle for a good contract in 1976. The BRG invited brothers Pete Kelly, Jordan Sims, and Erwin Baur, all leaders with years of experience in the UAW, to address rank and file workers in the area on the upcoming contract negotiations in the industry.

The brothers from Detroit are attempting to build a national movement of autoworkers to fight for a short work week at full pay, a guaranteed SUB program, a COLA in the pension program, and better protection against the rising cost of living.

KELLY REVIEWS CONTRACT STRUGGLE

After a brief introduction Pete Kelly, a fiery and knowledgeable speaker, took the podium. He reviewed the past three contracts in the industry. In 1967 there was a movement in the skilled trades for a "dollar an hour" wage increase. The International was under great pressure from below. Walter Reuther returned from the bargaining table with 50 cents an hour but the agreement included a 16 cents cap on the COLA.

The leaders of the "dollar an hour" movement went on television in Detroit and urged the workers to reject the agreement. Kelly told how he and others argued that a capped COLA would be a disaster. Reuther went on television and urged acceptance. The agreement was accepted.

The result was disastrous. Each autoworker lost over \$1500 in cost of living benefits during the life of the contract. In 1970 Walter Reuther apologized for his mistake. And that same year autoworkers had to conduct a 10 week strike against GM to regain the uncapped COLA.

In 1973, the United National Caucus, which grew out of the "dollar an hour movement," urged the International to strengthen the SUB program, Kelly continued. They predicted massive unemployment over the next few years. The International said that they were crazy, they didn't know what they were talking about. As we all know, in 1974-75, massive unemployment hit the industry. The SUB program went broke. In 1976 Leonard Woodcock apologized for this mistake.

"ANOTHER SCREWING"

Brother Kelly then asked the question: *What will our international have to apologize for in 1979?* To some, he said, apologizing is very "manly" and "heroic." Yet these apologies, it seems, only serve to "lay the foundation for another screwing." Brother Kelly urged the workers to organize themselves if they want a good contract in 1976.

Kelly hit on the hypocritical approach of the UAW leadership to the struggle against racism—marching in Selma, Alabama for equal rights while tolerating racism in their own backyard. For example, only one half of one percent of UAW skilled trades workers are Black.

Jordan Sims, the next speaker, has been a leader in the fight for equality within the UAW. Sims recounted his experience as a Black worker at the Eldon Gear and Axle plant where the dirtiest and most dangerous production jobs are largely Black while the skilled trades remain lily white.

In the 1960's Brother Sims realized that he would have to get involved himself if anything was to get done. He became a chief steward in his plant; he tried to defend his people. He tried to file grievances in their behalf. Many times, however, he was discouraged by UAW leaders from writing grievances. He was told that he should do things "their way," which was to do nothing at all. He became more and more outraged. Finally Brother Sims took on the president of his local, who had led a "dynasty" in power for over twenty years. He won the election.

SIMS VS. THE BUREAUCRACY

Once president of his local, Brother Sims ran head on into the international leadership of the UAW. He wanted to defend his people against the horrible and unsafe working conditions, the speed-up, discrimination and all the other forms of corporate abuse. The International wanted him to play ball with the corporations.

At first they offered him the carrot. They wined and dined him. They offered him a life of ease and comfort if he would only "cooperate." But Sims refused. So the

UAW leaders turned to the stick. They took over his local. They charged him with corruption. These charges required no proof for 18 months. In the UAW a man is considered guilty until proven innocent.

Brother Sims refused to give in. With the support of his membership, he continues as president of local 961 and as a leader of the national movement for a better UAW. He urged his audience to organize. "If we organize into a national movement we can regain control of the UAW." We can make the UAW once again into the militant defender of the working people. Brother Sims captured the hearts of those in attendance by his obvious compassion, determination and dedication to his fellow workers.

BUDD COUNCIL REP SPEAKS

The final speaker was Erwin Baur, representative to the Budd Council. Brother Baur focused his remarks on the problem of jobs.

He showed that the loss of work, the movement of jobs from one parts plant to another, and the problem of subcontracting was due to the lack of strong organization of the parts supplier workers within the UAW.

Brother Baur insisted that if the 300,000 parts workers were solidly organized under a common agreement, then the parts workers could be as powerful as GM workers and could end the deadly competition between them. Through stronger organization the problems of job security and working conditions could be tackled far more effectively.

COALITION MUST FIGHT RACISM

The Coalition for a Good Contract represents a real and potentially strong challenge to the UAW leadership this year. One serious weakness in the program of the coalition has been its failure to focus sharply on the question of racism and the issue of discrimination on the job and in upgrading.

Brother Bowen of the United Black Workers, a New Jersey based UAW rank and file group, urged the coalition to raise the demand for Martin Luther King's birthday to be a holiday. The coalition spokespeople agreed this would be a good demand and said they would raise it at the next meeting. If the coalition is to realize its promise it must take up the struggle against racism more aggressively.