

The DRUM Election

Dick Parris

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The struggle for political power within the United Auto Workers Union between the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the entrenched, conservative, white bureaucracy continued at the recent elections at Dodge local 3 of the Hamtramck Assembly Plant.

Held March 18 and 19, in the shadow of the grey, ugly plant on Joseph Campau, the incumbent leadership of local 3 turned to ballot stealing and cheating to insure the continuance of their racist leadership in the predominately black factory.

Ed Liska, the current local president running on the United Membership (UM) ticket defeated Ron March of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), a League affiliate, and Joe Gordon of the Workers Labor Alliance (WLA) who ran with an integrated slate on a reform platform.

The final tally claimed by the union leadership was Liska, 2,732; Gordon, 1,170; and March, 969. The other posts up for election generally reflected this vote pattern although Carlos Williams, the DRUM candidate for treasurer, made it to the April 9 runoff.

Both the DRUM and WLA slates were quick to label the elections as “rigged” and further charged that they were held completely in violation of the International Union rules.

Chuck Wooten, of the League Central staff, and Edith Fox of the WLA slate, both told the Fifth Estate that the two caucuses are jointly challenging the elections and demanding that fair ones be held.

Wooten said the ballot fixing occurred the day after the election when the union leadership and the Hamtramck police, whose headquarters are a half block down the street, physically pushed out all of the opposition slates' challengers. This left the election machines in the hands of Liska and the cops with only half of the machines sealed.

The Fifth Estate contacted Anthony J. Waluck of Mechanized Voting Systems, Inc. who said he had been conducting local 3 elections for “over twenty years.” He went on to say that the challengers were put out and the police only let in those “people who were responsible and sober.” This is a strange statement for Waluck since according to Wooten “Waluck and half his staff were drunk and couldn't fix the machines that were out of order.”

Wooten said that at the beginning of the voting only three of the 30 machines were working, causing a large jam up and some union members had to leave for their shift before getting a chance to cast their ballot. Waluck himself admitted that several of the machines were not functioning.

Wooten accused Waluck of deliberately sabotaging the machines by kicking out the electrical plugs. Members of both DRUM and WLA told of machines with levers that wouldn't pull for their candidates; machines with tallies on them from previous elections, and members voting on machines that were not registering and not being able to be allowed to vote again.

Fox estimated that over 1,000 people who registered were not counted in the elections. Also, many people showed up with “credentials” from the UM caucus who had no right to participate in the election, such as retired workers from other locals.

There were so many inconsistencies in the election that the Certified Public Accountant, Maurice Mackey, who was charged with conducting the election refused to certify the results until he was pressured into doing so by

George Morelli of the UAW region 1 A staff. Morelli and his staff occupied the local hall the day after the election to “supervise” the tallying. The League said this move by Morelli “was without precedent.”

The scene at the plant and union hall on the election days was extremely tense as DRUM made its presence known by flying huge black, red and green black nationalist flags and standing with large banners inscribed with League slogans, in front of the plant gates.

Down the street at the hall a crowd of about 70 DRUM members stood across from the hall chanting slogans like “Put a halter on Walter” (Ruether) and “We finally got the news on how our dues are being used.” Members of the UM caucus’s goon squad, 40ish and paunchy, wearing local caps and short jackets inscribed with the words “Flying Squadron,” lined up on the opposite side of the street to “protect” the union hall from its members.

Several individuals who came as witnesses at the request of DRUM were threatened by UM goons with having their throats slit if they didn’t leave the area. It was heavy, but there was no major violence.

While DRUM slate advocated a revolutionary program, and feels it could have won a fair election, Liska and the United Membership based their campaign for re-election on the following sparkling accomplishments: held a successful Christmas party, built two new retiree rooms (with new tables and chairs), arranged that members’ cars would no longer be ticketed in front of the local (no doubt with the cooperation of their friends down the street), and cooperated with the management at the plant to avert a “plant closing because of outside agitators.”

Of course, nowhere did Liska and his cronies mention the steadily deteriorating plant conditions, the speed-ups on the line, racism in the shop, or any of the thousand and one other grievances that make workers want to close a plant down without any need for assistance from fictional “outside agitators.”

The entrenched leadership of the International UAW shares the fear of the officials of local 3 over the growing power of DRUM. The insurgent revolutionary black workers’ caucus represents the general upsurge of rank and file union militants against the sell-out bureaucrats who occupy their posh offices in Solidarity House and fight for the company, not the workers.

The union bureaucrats correctly perceive that black workers are the leading force in a quickly developing movement of workers in this country and therefore have been engaged in a program of vicious slander in an attempt to discredit the organization of black workers.

However, the program of DRUM, which addresses itself to the problems of all workers, speaks louder to the man on the shop floor than the frenzied lies and accusations that come down from Ruether and Co. That frenzy is the result of panic from men who have seen that their end is near.

What’s next for DRUM at the plant? According to John Watson, of the League central staff, the answer is up to Ruether. “The more the International cheats, the more they clarify their role to the workers. The workers just won’t put up with that shit. Eventually the workers will either pull out of the union or burn it down. Whatever the UAW does, it is going to lose,” he said.

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