

Report From the 37th UAW Constitutional Convention

By Delegate Scott Houldieson

Let me begin by answering the question: What's the purpose of the UAW Constitutional Convention? If you've read my article in the Winter issue of the Informer or seen my interview with Paulette Hyneman on YouTube, this is a short refresher. Feel free to skip to Monday June 11th.

The UAW Constitutional Convention has three main purposes and an ancillary purpose. They are as follows:

1) Debate and pass resolutions that are supposed to inform the International Executive Board as they make decisions in the next four years. 2) Debate and pass or reject Amendments to the UAW Constitution. 3) Electing the UAW International Executive Board. Another activity at the Convention is networking with other delegates.

The Constitutional Convention also included speeches from high profile politicians and activists. We heard from Demos President Heather McGhee, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, Teamsters President James Hoffa Jr., Michigan Candidate for Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Montana Governor Steve Bullock Poor People's Campaign Co-Chair Reverend William Barber.



from the delegates. Virtually every debate and vote is on a committee report. The various resolutions we debate and vote on are reports of the Resolution Committee. Constitutional Amendments we debate and vote on are reports of the Constitution Committee.

The rule titled Committee Reports requires either an up or down vote on all committee reports. No amendments are allowed unless the report has been voted down by the entire convention delegation and referred back to committee not once but twice then voted down again before delegates can offer amendments from the floor. My motion was to amend rule number seven so "Properly recognized delegates may offer amendments to committee reports." This motion failed. The Administration Caucus is opposed to rules changes. They put out a glossy flier saying in part: "The proposed rules are the same basic rules used to conduct all previous UAW Conventions. History has demonstrated that these rules are fair and democratic, protecting the rights of both the minority and the majority." It goes on to say: "**We ask you to support the Rules Committee by voting FOR the adoption of the Committee's report and AGAINST any motion to amend any of the Rules.**"

This undemocratic procedure was an issue at the 2015 Bargaining Convention. I spoke on the bargaining resolution to point out the divisions our current contracts created in our membership. The tiered wage and benefit structure is divisive and needs to end. At the end of my statement I offered a one word amendment to the resolution. I requested to change the wording from Bridge the Gap to Eliminate the Gap. This received considerable applause from the delegates. But, my amendment wasn't allowed unless the entire resolution was voted down thrice. That didn't happen. Later in the Constitutional Convention this rule would come back to spoil reforms again.

For the rest of Monday we considered a few resolutions. We began with a resolution titled "Building Power By Organizing." It recognized the fact that UAW membership has grown by 20,000 members since the 2014 Constitutional Convention. It also noted the overall decline in union density explaining: "The decline in union density is also a threat to other organized industries within these sectors as it creates a scenario in which the unorganized workplaces are setting the standard for a particular sector rather than the higher paid, better protected organized workplaces. This places extreme pressure on members of organized labor to settle for less to protect their job security."

The obvious message is don't expect to win better contracts until we have greater union density. This logic helps create a negative feedback loop where it's increasingly difficult to organize new workplaces when we are making excuses rather than fighting for gains in the already organized workplaces. Yet we've witnessed teachers, many of whom lack collective bargaining rights, in state after state take on the fight for better working conditions. It can be done!



Heather McGhee President of Memos receiving the Owen Beiber Social Activist Award

Monday June 11th

The Constitutional Convention began on Monday. The opening ceremonies included a color guard posting the United States, Puerto Rican, Canadian and UAW flags and sing the National Anthems. This was followed by the pledge of allegiance and a prayer. The various convention committees were introduced. Those were Rules, Appeals, Constitution, Credentials and Resolutions committees.

The Credentials Committee reported out first. Their report included the number of Call letters sent to UAW Local unions (575), the number of Local unions who sent delegates (342) and the number of delegates registered (930). They also reported election appeals for delegate elections.

Convention rules are very important for democracy at the convention. When the Rules Committee presented their report I was recognized to speak about them. According to our constitution under Powers of Administration: "The highest tribunal shall be the International Convention composed of delegates democratically elected by the membership of Local Unions." Yet the established rules take much of that power away from the delegates and places it in the hands of the various hand picked committees.

I motioned to amend the rules for greater democracy and input

After the committee reads a resolution the chair of the convention at the time (International Executive Board members take turns chairing the meeting) opens debate by allowing two delegates from each region to speak for and two to speak against the resolution.

Brother Gary Walkowicz from Local 600 was recognized for a point of order and motioned for a resolution to be brought out of the book of those submitted by local unions. He then read the resolution aimed at having a standardized contract ratification process. A similar resolution was also passed by Local 551.

The necessity for this change to our constitution arose from the peculiar way the 2015 contract vote was conducted at Local 600. After several large locals had rejected the contract it was facing defeat and renegotiation. In an act of desperation, prompted by International negotiators, Local 600 extended voting for 10 days and had representatives who were involved with negotiations taking ballots and ballot boxes around some of the plants pressuring members to vote yes while they were on their jobs.

He read the resolution over childish noisemakers distributed to delegates in a couple of regions. I'm glad no such noisemakers were passed out to Region 4 delegates. Here's the resolution Gary read: Whereas: The ratification of National and Local contracts is just as important to our members as the election of union officers. Whereas: There have been questions in the past about the counting of contract ratification votes. Therefore: Be it resolved that all contract ratifications votes must be conducted with the same rules and regulations as are required for union elections, including, but not limited to: safe and secure ballot boxes (or electronic voting), ratification votes conducted by a duly elected Election Committee, correct and verified voting lists, and the right for challengers to watch the voting, the securing of the ballot boxes and the counting of votes.

After reading the resolution a show of hands in support of debate and voting on the resolution is taken. According to the convention rules 147 delegates are needed to allow debate. Not enough delegates were in favor of this common sense resolution. The motion died.

As Monday's session was coming to a close, I rose and was recognized by Vice President Settles for a point of order. I noted that Constitutional Amendments are the most important things we will consider at this convention. Yet, although a request was made to have the proposed amendments included in our registration kits they were not included. In order to have adequate time to review the proposed amendments I motion to have all of them available for the delegates first thing in the morning. Without debate Vice President Settles called for a voice vote. The motion passed.

This was important. At the 2010 Convention I was a first time delegate. When Constitutional Amendments were considered the first glimpse we had was literally ten minutes before they were going to be read to us by a member of the Constitution Committee. One of those Amendments was approval for the International Executive Board to transfer \$25 million out of the strike fund in each of the next four years. We had roughly 25 minutes to see it and debate the wisdom of that before voting. That's no way to make changes to a document with such a far reaching effect on the UAW and our members.

Tuesday June 12th: Constitutional Amendments

When we arrived at the convention hall all of the proposed amendments were on each delegates table. Tuesday looked to be a day of intense debate. The day began with a speech. International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) President James Hoffa said: "There is no greater solidarity than that between the Teamsters and the

UAW," He went on to say. "Next year is a pivotal moment for the UAW as you head into negotiations with the Big 3. I am here to tell you that the 1.4 million members of the Teamsters Union will be there to stand shoulder to shoulder with you."

The first Constitutional Amendment up for debate dealt with UAW members dues. It contains a provision that allows the rate members are required to pay to revert from the current 2.5 hours per month to the old rate of 2 hours if certain conditions are met. It also addresses part time workers dues. The delegates from Local 551 conferred and asked if I would speak against the amendment. Here is what I had to say:

"I rise to speak against this resolution and I have the support of my entire delegation in speaking against this resolution after consulting with them. I'd also like to commend the Constitution Committee for coming up with a creative solution for converting back to two hours. My issue isn't with that. Temporary workers in this union and in my local in particular get no bonuses. They work less than forty hours in a week. They're in a precarious situation. They're on potentially years of extended probationary status. Basically they're oppressed. Yet in violation of the constitutional changes that were made by this body four years ago they've been paying two and a half hours of union dues rather than 1.44%. I see you have a way to claw that out. That doesn't correct what was done four years ago. Those folks need to be reimbursed.

New language in this constitutional amendment referring to non-traditional sector being the ones afforded the percentage rather than the two and a half hours if they're part time enshrines division in our constitution and I think that's a shame. Traditional and non-traditional part time workers will be treated differently under the dues structure of our constitution and that's wrong.

I'd like to pivot now to the \$850 million threshold and under that threshold the dues will revert back to two hours per month. I think that's a good idea and that's a creative idea, but I want to know what mechanism will allow the strike fund to continue to grow once we get to that \$850 million and revert back to the two hours."



Is the interest from the strike fund going to remain in the strike fund? No

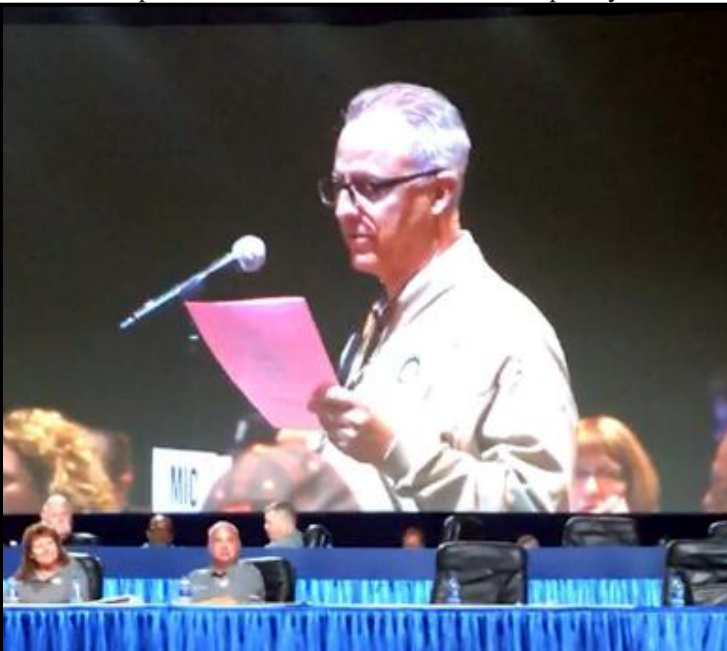
"Is the interest from the strike fund going to remain in the strike fund?" President Williams answered No. "Will the 13th rebate check be eliminated or reduced?" President Williams said No. "Will the monthly rebates be reduced?" President Williams answered No. "Is there any mechanism to continue to grow the strike fund after it reaches that \$850 million threshold that allows the strike fund to continue to grow?" President Williams answered "Only if the International Executive Board makes the choice to

keep the interest in there. That's it, but the constitution allows the interest to go to the International General Fund and the rebates to go to both the International and the Local unions."

I went on to say: "For those reasons and most specifically because we are enshrining division between traditional and non-traditional workers into our sacred constitution I am in opposition to this amendment and furthermore I would love right now to be able to offer an amendment because there are good parts to this. I'd love to be able to offer an amendment but unfortunately the rules do not allow that. We addressed that yesterday. So because we cannot amend it to make equity possible in our constitution I recommend the delegates to vote against it! And my entire delegation will vote against this resolution!"

After debate ended I was recognized and requested a roll call vote on the amendment. A roll call vote records each delegates vote and required the support of 313 delegates. There were nowhere near enough delegates who were willing to go on the record. A voice vote was conducted. It wasn't clear, but a hand vote showed that it passed by roughly a two to one margin.

Another constitutional amendment we debated was to update International Union policy on discrimination. The amendment added disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression to the classes protected under the discrimination policy.



Local 551 delegate Mike Marzillo rose to speak on a Constitutional Amendment about Civil Rights

Local 551 delegate Mike Marzillo was recognized to speak in favor of the amendment. Here is what Mike had to say: "I want to state this is long overdue. And I want to commend you for this. I stand before you today and I really gotta say I support this amendment." After debate ended the amendment passed unanimously.

Another amendment dealt with International Representatives pay. It changed the full salary for International Representatives (those who've been appointed to International Staff as Servicing reps, International Health & Safety reps, International Quality reps etc...) from \$105,076.96 to \$111,476.15 per year, roughly a 6% increase.

It goes on to change the way the International Executive Board salaries are determined. Instead of stating the salaries for International Executive Board members, as was the prior practice, it's now based on a multiplier of an International Representative salary.

International President shall be paid 1.8 times the salary of International Representatives per year. International Secretary/Treasurer shall be paid 1.67 times what an International Representative is paid. Vice Presidents shall be paid 1.62 times the salary of times the salary of International Representatives per year. Regional Directors shall be paid 1.49 times the salary of International Representatives per year.

Take a closer look at these numbers. The International President got an increase from \$153,248.29 to \$200,655.27 which is an astonishing 30.9% increase. The International Secretary/Treasurer salary went from \$142,080.87 to \$186,163.50 which is a 31% increase. The Vice Presidents salaries went from \$137,718.59 to \$180,589.74 another 31% increase. Regional Directors salaries rose from \$126,551.13 to \$166,097.97 another 31% increase.

There were plenty of delegates wishing to speak against this amendment. Those who spoke in favor of the amendment noted that this salary still left our International Officers well below the salaries of other unions. Those speaking against were mostly noting that their members had received scant increases if any. Others noted the large percentage for increases. There were plenty of delegates to choose from to speak against this amendment and others were selected. After debate ended a voice vote was taken. It wasn't clear if the amendment had passed. A show of hands made it clear that the amendment passed by about two to one.

After this vote was taken I was recognized to speak. I asked for a resolution from the submitted resolutions book to be brought up for debate and a vote. The resolution was the One Member One Vote resolution. I won't repeat the details of that resolution here. If you haven't seen this resolution which was passed by our Local and six other local unions and would like a copy contact me and I will get you one. I read the resolution to the delegates. President Williams at one point called the delegates to order who were using their clickers to try and disrupt my reading of the One Member One Vote resolution. In order to get this out of committee and up for debate and a vote it required the support of 147 delegates. Only about 40 agreed so my motion died for lack of support.

There was also an amendment to incorporate an extra appeal level for a decision by a local Executive Board to allow charges to go to a trial committee in Article 31. The old appeal ended with the International Executive Board. The new process allows either party to appeal to the Public Review Board. After debate ended a voice vote was taken and it passed unanimously.

Wednesday June 13th, IEB Election Day

Wednesday opened up with some more resolutions. One of those resolutions was titled Trade Policy. Delegate after delegate rose in support of this resolution stating that we need "Fair Trade" policies. I was recognized to speak against this resolution. Here's what I had to say:

"Brothers and sisters, I stand against this resolution because let's face it I don't think anybody in this room can name me any trade agreement that has been in favor of the working class. Not once since GATT in the 1940's to the TPP in 2010 not one of them has been negotiated by and for workers. Even if we had a seat at the table the vast majority of the seats are corporate lobbyists and the corporate lobbyists are going to get their way. So what do we do about that? We make noise right? We organize! We organize the working class internationally. We go wherever they are negotiating these trade agreements and we protest them! We try to shut them down like they did in Seattle in 1999 with the World Trade Organization negotiations! They shut them down! That's what we need to do! We have the power! We have the numbers! But do we have the courage!?"

I've seen a lot of worker courage. I've seen workers in other countries with courage. Consider the workers in Colombia that worked at the GM factory. They got hurt on the job and were fired. They formed an association named ASOTRECOL. They reached out to the UAW to help them get justice. They've been in an encampment in front of the US Embassy since 2011 because let's face it the United States government was the owner of GM for part of that time. So that's why they went there. They need justice. They need our help.

Joe Ashton went down there with GM and gave them a take it or leave it deal. We can do better. We need to give it another shot. We need to go down there and help them get justice. Also for working class solidarity. There were requests from militant farm workers in Mexico to come and speak before you and tell you their story. They weren't invited so it's up to me to tell you their story. The farm workers in the Baja California section of Mexico they pick berries for Driscoll's."

At this point Secretary/Treasurer Gary Casteel, who was chairing the meeting said "Scott I'm going to give you a couple of minutes here. It's getting close." I replied "ok let me know when my time is up." To which he replied I think it's up. After watching the video of my remarks it was clear that I had used three and a half minutes of my five minute allotment. I guess my message of working class solidarity was too much for Casteel. Or maybe it was my mention of Joe Ashton who wasn't among the past UAW leaders to join them on the stage.

I went on to say: "What I am saying is we need to support their Driscoll's boycott. We need to support the boycott of Driscoll's berries. We need to do more to fight for the working class around the world. Thank you."

Elections

The election process started in the afternoon. Presidential nominations came first. Jason Starr, delegate from Local 249 in Kansas City, MO gave a nomination speech for Gary Jones. I gave a nomination speech for Gary Walkowicz and Abe Elam from Local 74 in Ottumwa, IA gave a speech for Brian Keller but was cut off because his nomination speech went beyond the five minute time allowed. The next position up for nomination was Secretary/Treasurer. Gary Roseboro from Local 5285 nominated Ray Curry. Abe Elam from Local 74 nominated Dennis Voytko. Next to be nominated were the three Vice President positions. Bernie Ricke from Local 600 nominated Rory Gamble. Dave Greenhalgh from Local 2177 nominated Terry Dittes. John Zimmick nominated Cindy Estrada for reelection. I nominated Sharon Bell from Local 909.

The election was conducted by roll call vote. Candidates could run individually or by slates. Gary Walkowicz ran as an independent. Gary Jones ran with Ray Curry, Rory Gamble, Cindy Estrada and Terry Dittes as a slate. Brian Keller ran with Dennis Voytko and Sharon Bell on a slate. If all of the delegates from a local were in agreement the Local could vote as a block.

The election wasn't close. The Jones slate (Administration Caucus) won in a landslide. Brian Keller received the

votes of three delegates. Gary Walkowicz received the votes of seven delegates. Dennis Voytko and Sharon Bell each got seven votes. The Jones slate won with the remaining 945 delegates.

Thursday June 14th, Final Day

Thursday opened up with President Williams swearing in the newly elected officers. Then we heard from Michigan Gubernatorial Candidate Gretchen Whitmer. After her speech we considered some more resolutions. Then we heard from Reverend William Barber. Reverend Barber is President of the North Carolina NAACP. He's waged high profile campaigns for Social and Economic Justice. In 2013 he led the Moral Monday's civil rights protests at the North Carolina capital. The Moral Monday's movement was based on a coalition of diverse advocacy groups. The coalition, include advocates for immigrant rights, LGBT rights, criminal justice, worker's rights, environmental issues and more.

Reverend Barber and Reverend Liz Theoharis began working together on a nationwide campaign for social and economic justice. Their efforts are a continuation of Reverend Martin Luther King's Poor Peoples Campaign.

Here are a few of Reverend Barber's remarks: "They've come up with this language about the right and the left in order to divide us. Some of us got trapped in it, talking about some people on the right and some people on the left. Last time I checked I'm a human being. I have a right hand and a left hand. Why do we spend so much time saying the right this and the right that then in the next sentence try to convince them that they're wrong? Instead of right and left some things are just about right and wrong not about right and left.

The southern strategy started embracing a heretical kind of religion that grew out of slave justification through religion. The religion they sold all over the south based on wedge issues. It says if you want to be with God's agenda you've got to be against gay people, against abortion, for prayer in schools, for gun rights, for states rights, and for tax cuts. And that's God's agenda. People began to buy that. Especially people that don't know the Bible.

They don't know that God's agenda is when I was hungry did you feed me? When I was naked did you cloth me? When I was sick did you care about me? When I was a worker did you pay me a fair wage? That's God's agenda!

Something else happened. Many progressives, after the deaths of King, Kennedy and others began focusing on election year organizing and not movement building. So we build up for elections and then after the election whoever wins we just go back. You can't change a country with that kind of now and then organizing. Then in the early 70's we took the word poor out of our political discussion. We didn't lose the war on poverty. We left the field."

With three resolutions from the Proposed Resolutions left to consider we voted to pass the rest without reading and without debate. The 37th UAW Constitutional Convention adjourned around 12:30pm on Thursday.

There's much to be done to make our union a true beacon for democracy. That work starts with planning now!

