

Drum Roll for a Social Movement

The UAW Bargaining Convention is convened every four years to set goals and bargaining strategy. When the UAW represented the majority of auto workers and the Detroit Three dominated manufacturing in the USA, the UAW Bargaining Convention attracted nationwide attention. In this era of company-union partnership not even lineworkers pay attention.

Back in the day, the UAW set the benchmark not only for its own members, but for all workers. Today, the UAW benchmark is below the waterline. The exportation of jobs is a weak excuse.

Foreign auto makers and parts suppliers pervade the American landscape. The US is fertile ground for cheap labor because the UAW failed its primary mission — to organize. The UAW is a business union and as such is dependent on business not workers for its power and direction. The UAW does not act on the principles of unionism, but rather the competitive corporate agenda.

While the relevance of the UAW Bargaining Convention wanes, its old hat — Benchmark Setter — worn with the bill in back, reveals a significant trend: the rape of the new generation.

I don't use the word lightly. Rape is a physically violent crime which robs the victim of possession, dignity, and volition. The complicity of the UAW in two-tier and temp status is tantamount to the social, economic, and personal rape of an entire generation of workers.

Two-tier is a degenerate institutional act of deliberate degradation without the consent of the victim who is not permitted to vote. The legitimization of long term and even permanent temp status not only subjugates and humiliates, but the UAW charges temp workers maximum dues for the stigma of second class membership. Discrimination against new workers is the scourge of our time.

Both trends — two-tier and temp — are prevalent in society at large, but predominance does not justify sanction. While the young and the temporary are presently powerless, the pendulum will swing again. When it does, the only safe place for baby boomers will be below ground.

The best investment UAW delegates can make at the 2011 Bargaining Convention is an unequivocal commitment to equal pay for equal work and the abolition of temp status in the UAW. A commitment to genuine solidarity and equality would set a benchmark that could motivate young workers and drumroll a social movement worth the UAW's legacy.

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