

Open Letter to Walter Reuther

From the Central Staff of the
League of Revolutionary Black Workers

Dear Walter:

There is no doubt that the U.A.W. is run by a gang of white racists led by yourself. After 30 years of struggle the U.A.W. still has an executive board which is 92% white dominated (8% handkerchief head Uncle Toms), the skilled trades are still virtually closed to blacks; the international reps are still 95% white, and the international staff is 90% white. Black workers are still the last hired, first fired, rarely promoted and work at the hardest, dirtiest, noisiest, most dangerous jobs in the industry. Many local union leaders openly brag of their affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan, their support for George Wallace and their contempt for anything black. With over thirty years of movement behind, the U.A.W. has had plenty of time to eliminate racism within its own ranks, yet, has chosen not to do so.

We know that once again this is your convention, that once again you own the broadwalk, and for 2 more years the game is yours Walter. But we understand how you got here Walter. We understand very very well because we were the victims of your winning strategy. Yes, we forced your hand, we made you get nasty in order to win this time Walter. At Local 600, elections in the Dearborn Assembly Plant were held during a week in which the plant was closed down. Election polls were closed and locked. When Challengers tried to stay with the ballots, they were threatened with the presence of the Dearborn Police Department. At Local 961, at the Eldon Plant, ballot boxes were taken to the POLICE STATION overnight for safe keeping and 3 members of ELRUM and also candidates for the 22nd Constitutional Convention were arrested on trumped up charges 4 days before the election by the DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT. At Local 3, the DRUM slate forced you to do things that you had never done before Walter. You really showed your hand. You couldn't even muster enough retirees to defeat us. You had to call upon the Hamtramck Police Department once again Walter. The police department had to forcibly throw our Challengers out of the Hall at gun point and that was not even enough Walter. You then had to send in George Merrill, a long term gangster in your employ with fifty armed henchmen to take over our Local in the midst of our election.

So it comes of no surprise to us to hear that 90% of the Convention Delegates attended your caucus in Atlantic City, Sunday night. It is no big thing that you won the election for President and it is no big thing that every progressive reform that by some strange tricks might reach the floor was defeated.

Walter, we can not be fooled by the fact that our Sister, Coretta King, is a speaker at this Convention, because this has always been your policy and history has taught us that you cannot change.

But we see that you acknowledged our existence this time Walter, and even though our voices won't be heard from the floor of the 22nd Convention, they will be heard. The Constitutional Convention only lasts for one week Walter, so the struggle is not for the broadwalk by the ocean, that is not where cars and trucks and tanks and planes are produced Walter. Perhaps you have forgotten that fact that our voices will be heard in places you haven't been for a long long time Walter. They will be heard at the gates of Dodge Main - in the sweat shops at Fords - through the smoke and pollution of foundrys. Yes, we will be heard Walter, and heard by you.

So while you are denouncing the DRUM movement and the black workers struggle in general, remember that none of our people are at your Convention - you personally saw to it that they didn't come Walter. But also remember that the delegates do not represent the membership of the U.A.W., but only the most reactionary elements who remain loyal to you.

We want you to know that great anger burns in our hearts. For us, the problems of working at Ford or G.M. are hard realities, not abstractions discussed in your "union leadership" classes. The reality finds us working under conditions synonymous with plantation chain gang slavery; the only difference is that on the plantation we moved down the line and at Chrysler the line moves past us. We work under unsafe conditions - in hot polluted air - incredible noise - and at a pace of work designed for pack animals. Yet our wages are low and our taxes high. What fruits do we reap from our lifelong toil? All around us our houses rot, our schools are inadequate, the streets and alleys are overrun with rodents and kill crazy police, decent food and clothing or medical and dental care is beyond our reach, our children are sent off to war and we have no hope of ever changing any of this if we continue to follow the established leadership and to accept the established order of this society. We are making the revolution, Walter Reuther, and we will win.

Salaam,
Central Staff,
League of Revolutionary Black Workers