

LABOR NOTES

"Let's Put the Movement Back in the Labor Movement"

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'Movement' vs. 'Machine'

New Directions Leader Jerry Tucker Wins Election in United Auto Workers District 5

by Kim Moody

Jerry Tucker is the new Director of Region 5 of the United Auto Workers (UAW). The 80,000-member region covers eight states from Colorado to Texas with headquarters in St. Louis. But the impact of Tucker's election is being felt beyond Region 5. For many, it is the beginning of a new political situation in the union.

Tucker won his bid for regional director against incumbent Ken Worley, who was backed by the UAW's Solidarity House leadership. The vote was 362,174 to 327,826. The election was supervised by the U.S. Labor Department, which agreed with Tucker's contention that the UAW had unfairly conducted the original election two years ago.

The vote was finally held at a special Region 5 convention on September 2 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Although originally scheduled for August 11, the convention had been postponed on a technicality when Worley supporters used their own misconduct as grounds for delay.

'MOVEMENT' VS. 'MACHINE'

Reporting from Tulsa, *The Wall Street Journal* observed that "the image of 'movement' vs. 'machine' was very much evident at the convention." It was more than an image.

Tucker's victory was not just a personal triumph of one official replacing another. Tucker ran as the leader of an organized rank and file-based caucus, the New Directions movement.

From the beginning, the direct involvement of rank and file activists has been a key to building the New Directions movement. Tucker, who was formerly assistant director of the Region, became popular through encouraging the use of direct action campaigns that mobilized the mem-

bership against concession demands.

Mobilization, democracy, and opposition to the UAW's ever cozier relationship to management have been the guidelines of New Directions' program.

UNION-WIDE IMPACT

New Directions activist Wayne Belue explained the significance of Tucker's election for the whole union. "It was an election between Tucker and [UAW President Owen] Bieber," he said. Belue characterized the vote as a "referendum on the policies of the international."

Far from Region 5, Donny Douglas, president of UAW Local 594 at GM's truck and bus plant in Pontiac, Michigan, told the *Detroit Free Press*, "I think Jerry Tucker represents an outcry from the rank and file...people who before thought they had no chance to beat the system."

Douglas is one of several local leaders who may challenge Solidarity House-backed candidates for regional director positions at next year's Constitutional Convention.

Douglas' possible candidacy is one indication of the impact of Tucker's victory. If he runs, Douglas would challenge incumbent and International loyalist Bob Lent in the soon-to-be-merged Regions 1 and 1B, which cover much of the Detroit-Pontiac area. Douglas already has the backing of many local presidents and officials in these regions.

Bob King, president of Local 600 at the Ford Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan, is also expected to run against a supporter of the International in Region 1A. King has not openly supported Tucker and does not identify himself as an opponent of the International leadership. Nevertheless, some of his views on the direction of the union coincide with Tucker's, and a number of offi-

cials in Local 600 who will be supporting King identify with Tucker and New Directions.

Pro-New Directions activists in Region 10 are also hoping that Rudy Kuzel, bargaining chairman of Local 72 at Chrysler's Kenosha, Wisconsin plant, will run for director of that region.

INSPIRATION

Whether or not the 1989 elections produce a new crop of regional directors, activists around the country are drawing inspiration from both Tucker's message and his victory.

Russ Leone, president of Local 600's tool and die unit, says, "A lot of people are unhappy with the way the union's going and Tucker's election shows them that there's some hope. It gives the membership a shot in the arm so they can go out there and make some changes."

Rank and file members of Local 879 at Ford's St. Paul, Minnesota plant have started a newsletter called *The Voice of New Directions*. The first issue reported on Tucker's victory.

Pete Kelly, president of Local 160 at the GM Tech Center in Warren, Michigan, announced his intention to form a New Directions caucus in that local.

'Jerry Tucker represents an outcry from the rank and file...people who before thought they had no chance to beat the system.'

At a meeting of the UAW's Martin Marietta council in New Orleans, the shop chairman of the Baltimore plant told Tucker, "You're a hero to our people. We followed what you've been doing and got everything we could get our hands on into the plant."

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Tucker Elected in UAW Region 5—cont'd

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While Tucker encourages activists in other regions to organize New Directions groups and run candidates, he emphasizes that such efforts must be based on a real program for the union. He also insists the "secret" to the success of New Directions is rank and file involvement.

Earlier this year, Tucker told a meeting of local UAW officers, "You can't beat city hall with another city hall. You have to get the members active."

COVERT INACTION

Solidarity House will not make life easy for Tucker. For one thing, the UAW International controls the hiring of all International Representatives. Of the 18 reps on the Region 5 staff, only a few support Tucker. The Reps service the locals and often negotiate grievances.

Although Tucker can direct the assignment of the Reps, his ability to carry out his programs could be limited by their covert inaction.

The International has already said Tucker does not have the right to pick his own assistant director. This is traditionally the prerogative of the regional director. For now, however, Roy Wyse, previously Worley's assistant, holds the title.

Further, Tucker's term expires at next June's Constitutional Convention. Since the delegate elections for

that convention will be held some time in spring, he will have to begin campaigning again very soon.

The UAW leadership can be expected to vigorously support a candidate against Tucker. The *Wall Street Journal* quoted a staffer from the union's Detroit headquarters as saying, "You know where I'm gonna spend the next 10 months? Right here in this region. You watch me."



POSITIVE ACTION

Tucker says he does not intend to get pinned down in a lot of in-fighting. Rather he says he'll work with the membership to get the region going.

"At the same time, my door will be open to any member with a problem," Tucker says. "In fact, I've already had phone calls and drop-ins from rank and file members. That's unheard of in this office until now."

Typical of Tucker's approach is a plan to hold fact-finding hearings in plants throughout the region "to see if there is a trend of corporations using the new religion of cooperation between unions and management to gain advantage unfairly."

The fact-finding campaign will begin at GM plants, Tucker says, but

will include any where the members feel there is a problem. While the region will coordinate the effort, the fact-finders will be the members in the plants.

It is not only Tucker who has responded to the International's attempts to derail the New Directions movement. Some members have taken Tucker's victory as a sign to act on their grievances themselves.

Long-time grievances at GM's model "team concept" plant in Wentzville, Missouri exploded on September 12 when 500 members of Local 2250 turned their team meetings into a mass protest. They surrounded the shop committee's plant office demanding that shop chairman and Worley-supporter Joe Henry handle their accumulated grievances.

Ironically, Henry was out of town on a joint management-union junket, so the assembled workers elected their own representatives. Management agreed to negotiate with the unofficial committee.

After years of monolithic leadership, a genuine alternative is taking shape in the UAW. Whatever the UAW International does to contain the New Directions movement, it may be that uniformity at the top and conformity in the ranks are a thing of the past.

A Message From Region 5 Leadership for Tucker

THE ELECTION'S OVER — LET'S ACT LIKE IT

It would be adding insult to injury if, after being forced by Federal Courts to conduct a new Regional election to correct the injustice done to the Region 5 membership in 1986, certain persons in the UAW International leadership continued down a path of senseless retribution and obstructionism. The members of Region 5 have spoken! Jerry Tucker was elected by a solid majority. He has earned the right to direct the activities of our Region and must be accorded the same rights and responsibilities as any other Regional Director.

When he was elected, Jerry Tucker stated he would work with everyone to pull Region 5 back together. He held out an olive branch to the National leadership and his political opponents in the Region. That commitment is still there and is being fulfilled every day by activities and efforts consistent with the policies and programs of our union. What purpose does the current denial of normal administrative rights and promotion of intentional aggravation serve?

When next year's Constitutional Convention comes around and candidates want to challenge for the office of Director, so be it. We welcome an honest, issue-filled campaign to determine the direction of our union. In the meantime stop denying our rights, subverting our purpose, and endangering our union's reputation even further.

THE REGION 5 NEW DIRECTIONS STEERING COMMITTEE