

Stopover at UAW grows to labor of love

By SUSAN ROSIEK

Howard Young moved his family to Livonia and took a job as special assistant to the president of the United Auto Workers Union in 1960 because "it seemed like an interesting thing to do for about three or four years."

It turned out to be more challenging than he expected and 21 years, four children, three presidents and countless rounds of contract talks later, Young is ready to tackle a new decade with the giant labor union.

He was a member of the recent UAW negotiating team at the Chrysler talks in Washington, D.C. and now serves as director of the UAW Social Security and Health and Safety departments at Solidarity House.

When Young, 48, first joined the UAW to work as an actuary and do pension math. A native of New York state, he earned a degree in math at City College of New York and received his master's in economics from the University of Michigan.

HE LEFT THE UAW IN 1971 to work for the League Life Insurance Co. During that time he started writing a book and did some consulting work.

But the stimulating atmosphere at the labor union eventually lured Young back in 1974.

He has worked closely with the late Walter Reuther, Leonard Woodcock and Doug Fraser.

Young describes his recent stint as a negotiator in the Chrysler Washington talks as a "very frustrating experience" marked by a lot of firsts.

"Usually you're on the upbeat and thinking what can you gain. In this case, it was a very frustrating experience because it was a matter of how little can you give away," explained Young, who added it was the first time the federal government was involved in such negotiations.

IN SPITE OF the frustration, Young feels a sense of accomplishment working for the labor union because its leaders are receptive to new ideas.

He notes that the UAW team managed to pare the worker concessions sought by the struggling auto company.

"We were able to keep a COLA (cost of living allowance) payment due in March and some additional pension increases that were already negotiated," said Young.

The concessions were a key element of Chrysler's survival plan and a requirement for some \$400 million in federal loan guarantees. There is still \$300 million left from the \$1.5 billion in loan guarantees authorized by Congress.

In the end, UAW concessions of \$522 million will bring the total UAW concession to some \$1.1 billion over three years. Chrysler got its wage freeze and there will be no more COLA.

Concessions also were made by Chrysler's lenders, suppliers and salaried employees.

WILL THE new plan save Chrysler?
"I think it's got a reasonable chance for survival," offered Young.

"I'm so confident I'm in the process of buying a Chrysler car."

Young noted that although Chrysler has been the focus of attention in recent months "overall economic activity is a serious question."

"There has to be a change in economic policy and specifically as it affects the auto industry," said Young.

"The new administration will have to deal with the import question. And in an effort to lift the overall level of economic activity, interest rates must be addressed. Interest rates are a significant factor," said Young, who added he supports a tax credit to encourage the purchase of American-made cars.

YOUNG CHIDES those who look at the auto industry dilemma as an isolated or regional problem.

"Auto is a very big part of the U.S. economy. The whole nation — not just Detroit — is significantly affected by what happens."

"If Chrysler fails, it wouldn't just be a failure, it would be a catastrophic event," he said.

Looking ahead, Young said his guess is that labor, in particular the UAW, can expect to have an "arm's-length relationship" with the new administration. Although generally in agreement with the philosophy of the former Democratic leadership, Young noted that the Carter administration in the area of economic policy was "always more conservative than we (the UAW) thought it would be."

"It was too timid to do what had to be done on imports. The president and his advisors kept saying they couldn't do anything. That perception changed. But they were generally ineffective in helping to direct and guide and achieve the goals we want."

"That doesn't mean bureaucrats or government employees should make every day-to-day decision. Government has proven it can provide a framework in which to achieve those goals. It seems to me in a democratic system — government is how we express those desired goals."

Young disagrees with those who view government as "the bad guy."

"Government has an important part to play. The most fundamental question is what should be the role of government in helping to direct and guide and achieve the goals we want."

"That doesn't mean bureaucrats or government employees should make every day-to-day decision. Government has proven it can provide a framework in which to achieve those goals. It seems to me in a democratic system — government is how we express those desired goals."

YOUNG BELIEVES in a "participatory democracy" and is bothered when people talk about government as "they."

"Who is they? I don't buy the philosophy that the least government is the best. To dismantle it or make it ineffective would be a mistake."

"People forget some of the things that 'government' has done — farm support payments and FHA (Federal Home Administration). Most people 50 and younger go to sleep at night and never worry about their money in a bank. They don't remember the bank panic in the '30s."

"But the only reason we're not having that same kind of panic today is because of something called the

FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.) — a government program."

YOUNG BELIEVES government's role is three-fold.

- Pool resources when needed.
- Outline the consensus of the nation.
- Provide a clear framework in which to achieve national goals and objectives.

Although his UAW post keeps him busy, Young has put his ideas about a participatory democracy into action at the local level. He's served as president of Livonia's Human Relations Commission and is past president of the School Board Advisory Council. He's also served on several other ad hoc school committees.

Young's tenure with the UAW has been interesting has provided a wide range of variety. He's worked with labor leaders who've helped to shape

economic policies.

ALTHOUGH THE union's leadership has changed over the years, the goals have remained the same.

Young remembers the late Walter Reuther as a "very bright and quick person in addition to being very charismatic."

"He knew how to communicate with people," said Young. "It was intellectually stimulating to work for him."

He called Woodcock "the intellectual labor leader."

"He's a very well-read man who studies and adapts to his role. Woodcock was a very private person who always enjoyed a good working relationship with the union members."

In describing Fraser, Young points to the man's keen sense of timing.

"He's knows how to get things done," said Young.



HOWARD YOUNG

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— Howard Young

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