

## **A Few minutes with the Boss**

*By: Joseph Andalina*

### **The rhetoric ratchets up**

By now most of you even remotely interested in labor have heard about the comments made by Teamster president James Hoffa while warming up President Obama at a recent speech.

Let's repeat it if you haven't. Hoffa stated (among other things) "Let's take these sons of bitches out and give America back to our America where we belong." He was talking about the Tea Party people.

Immediately the Republican pundits and the far-right became aghast that a union leader would use such words like this. Where is their civility?

Now, I am a relatively educated man and fortunately made it past high school. I then went to college, got my degree, spent over a quarter century as a cop and have 30 years in the union business. I do not think that Hoffa meant to take them out in the sense of "whacking" them as some past associates with that union had made a past practice. My goodness, even his own dad was a victim of such a thing. That union does have that reputation and it continues to demonize them. But in this day and age, they are another large international involved in the political arena.

And while this union (MAP) and others may have competitive issues with the Teamsters, I do not believe that Hoffa did not mean this in the sense that it has been purported. Nor, however, do I believe he wants to take those "sons of bitches" out to dinner, either, like to the Red Lobster or for the Grand Slam breakfast at Denny's, even if these "sons of bitches" after all are a lot of elderly folks looking for an early bird special.

No, I believe that Hoffa simply fired up his base to express his anger at a "targeted" group. God bless Saul Alinsky. A tried and true tactic that both sides of the political spectrum are guilty of. Like I said, tried and true. And since when have labor disputes ever been civil, anyway? Not in my lifetime. I wish they were, but it just isn't so. Something to work at, but feisty talk is just...well... feisty talk.

Our recent celebration of Labor Day came to be as a result of the "Pullman Strike" over 100 years ago where laborers in the middle class were killed during protests. Haymarket Square was another bloody demonstration of labor and the forces used to defeat unions. There have been others, so testy language in politics is a much better venue to illustrate our ideals than the above.

Labor strife still exists today as there are employers who abuse their workers. And yes, as a union leader I do admit and actively espouse compromise when necessary. I believe that on certain occasions concessions are okay, if—and it's a big if—that employers and especially municipal employers are not lying to you about their financial woes. Too often, they do not tell the truth and the result is phony rhetoric designed to get someone's attention. And to bust unions. Nowadays you have to be deaf, dumb, and blind not to see a Republican push to destroy labor unions.

Hoffa's words did get some attention. He shouldn't be taken to task over them in the big picture (even though most of those Tea Party fellows are truly probably not sons of bitches).

But one gets tired of the right trying to destroy the workers and the unions in this country. Have no doubt; that is what they're trying to do.

So if you have to call someone or a group of someones an SOB to make your point, in the big scheme of things, that's okay. The problem is a lot of folks nowadays have forgotten, or like the far-right, have chosen to forget what has happened in the world of unions. They have diminished the struggle and are trying to destroy your ability to retain what you fought for through unions. Do we have to fight for these issues all over again? We should remember not to take our unions for granted because it can be easily lost.

Calling your opponent an SOB may not be politically correct, but tough talk is the norm in the world of unions. And you know what? I have been called worse by the not-so-civil municipal leadership. A thin skin I don't have.

Stay safe.

Vita é Bella