



RUSS MARSHALL

UAW retirees Dave Moore, John D'Agostino, and Jess Corona played active roles in the union's efforts to integrate bowling alleys, leagues, and tournaments in the 1940s. They posed for this photo at Detroit's Garden Bowl, which owner Joe Zainea says is the oldest operating bowling alley in the U.S.



Back When A-B-C
Meant

ABOLISH THE
BOWLING
COLORLINE

Almost any day of the week you can find UAW members and retirees—men and women of all races and colors—bowling together. They might be bowling on a local union-sponsored team, in a recreational league, in a local union league, or in UAW tournaments, all sanctioned by the American Bowling Congress and the Women's International Bowling Congress.

But it hasn't always been this way.

Forty-eight years ago, in 1947, the UAW was urging union bowlers to pull out of ABC and WIBC-sanctioned leagues and tournaments because the two dominant bowling organizations admitted whites only.

The UAW formed the National Committee for Fair Play in Bowling, a broad coalition chaired by future U.S. Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, which repeatedly demanded that the ABC and WIBC end their racist policies.

More importantly, the International Union took the campaign directly to local unions around the country, where Recreation Department staffers often locked horns with angry white bowlers who refused to break with the ABC and WIBC.

And, perhaps most amazingly, the UAW directly challenged the ABC-WIBC tournament monopoly by organizing alternative All-American Bowling Tournaments in major cities.

In 1950, largely due to the UAW-initiated campaign and a lawsuit filed by the union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the ABC and the WIBC were forced to open their doors to bowlers of all colors.

The union's campaign against segregated bowling was initiated by Walter Reuther shortly after he was first elected president of the UAW in 1946, recalls Olga Madar, who directed the union's Recreation Department

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Back When A-B-C
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ABOLISH THE BOWLING COLORLINE

(Continued from page 17)

from 1947 until she
retired as a UAW vice-presi-

dent in 1974.

"One of Walter's first actions as president was to urge the International Executive Board to put the union on record against segregated, discriminatory bowling," Madar told *Solidarity*. The IEB action followed steps taken by Local 600 bowlers at the Ford Rouge plant, who had written protest letters to the ABC as early as 1941. Local 600 went so far as to cancel a 1942 tournament rather than compete under the racist ABC policy.

At first glance the union's bowling campaign might seem unimportant compared to other issues facing labor after World War II. But bowling was exploding as a popular sport across post-war America and tens of thousands of UAW members were among the nation's growing legion of bowlers.

As early as 1942 the union reported that 1,210 men's teams and 140 women's teams were competing in 104 UAW bowling leagues in the Detroit area alone. After the war, bowling continued to be the most popular recreational activity of UAW members.

Then, as now, competition for trophies and prize money meant bowling in leagues and tournaments sanctioned by the ABC-WIBC monopoly. Black bowlers competed in leagues sanctioned by the Negro Bowling Association and often had trouble getting access to white-owned bowling alleys.

By asking white union members to bowl unsanctioned games, the UAW was asking them to consider principles of racial unity when participating in their favorite recreational activity. The UAW was not just challenging the institutional racism of the bowling establishment, says Madar. It was confronting bigotry within the ranks of the union itself. Not all UAW members were eager or willing to open their bowling teams and leagues to minorities.

Working closely with William Oliver, who co-directed the UAW's Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department, Madar set in motion a nationwide campaign aimed at the ABC, the WIBC, and the powerful Bowling Proprietors Association.

The UAW moved swiftly to build the Nation-



William Oliver, seated, reviews the first All-American Bowling Tournament plans with UAW Recreation Dept. staff Jess Corona and John D'Agostino in 1947. Oliver co-directed the UAW Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Dept. Olga Madar, inset photo, directed the Recreation Dept. and the union's campaign to abolish the bowling color line.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF REUTHER ARCHIVES, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

One of Reuther's first actions as president was to urge the International Executive Board to put the union on record against segregated, discriminatory bowling...At first glance the union's bowling campaign might seem unimportant compared to other issues facing labor after World War II. But bowling was exploding as a popular sport across post-war America and tens of thousands of UAW members were among the nation's growing legion of bowlers.

al Committee for Fair Play in Bowling at the top, and brought two local UAW activists onto the Recreational Dept. staff to do the all-important grassroots work on the local union level.

Hubert Humphrey, who was then mayor of Minneapolis, chaired the committee. Vice-Chair was Women's Open Golf Champion Betty Hicks. Other prominent members included Reuther, CIO President Philip Murray, NAACP

President Walter White, and World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Joe Louis.

The top committee solicited and won support from a broad spectrum of national and regional groups, including churches, youth organizations, veterans groups, colleges, public school educators, city parks and recreation departments, and other unions.

Meanwhile John D'Agostino and Jess Corona, the two new Rec Dept. staffers, worked with Madar to take the UAW message to local unions. They polled UAW locals about the new UAW policy and followed up with meetings where locals resisted and sought information.

D'Agostino, who joined the Rec. Dept. staff out of Local 735, recalls one particularly rough confrontation at a Detroit local. "It was a very

1948 Buffalo's First 1948
ALL-AMERICAN
BOWLING TOURNAMENT

TOURNAMENT DATES
Sat. & Sun., Feb. 22, 23, 1948

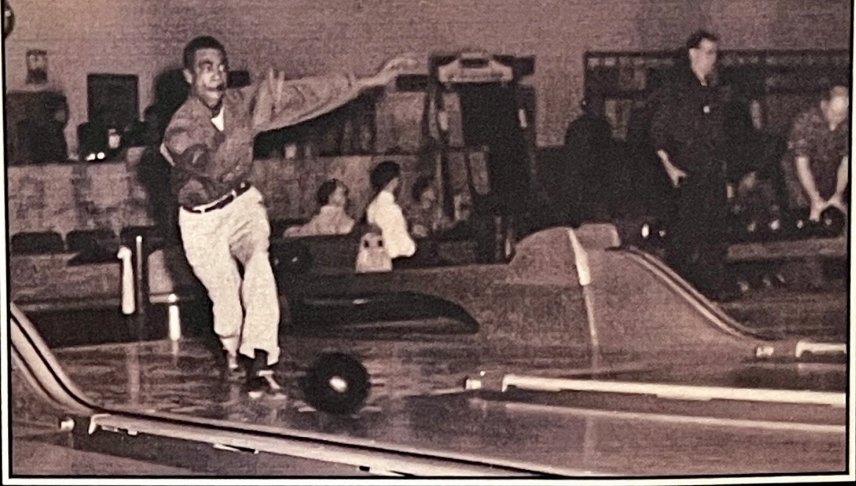
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REUTHER ARCHIVES, WSU



Local 600 Bowlers First to Integrate Detroit Alley

Before the UAW won the campaign to abolish the bowling color line in league and tournament competition, Local 600 members were the first to integrate white-owned bowling alleys in Detroit.

Dave Moore, a retired Local 600 activist and union staffer, recalls the brief but furious campaign.

"It was shortly after we organized the union at the Ford Rouge plant, in 1941," says Moore. "Johnny Gallo, who headed up our recreation committee, signed a contract for our local bowling league at the old Detroit Recreation Center on West Lafayette."

But when Local 600 bowlers arrived at the lanes, the black bowlers including Moore, were not allowed to bowl.

"Well," says Moore today, "all hell broke loose. Some of the white guys wanted to tear

the joint up they were so upset. The owners called the police, and we decided against that.

"But," continues Moore, "we threw up a picket line of about 1,000 workers outside the bowling alley, and then we got ahold of our lawyers."

The local turned to Detroit's best labor law firm, run by Maurice Sugar. Attorneys in Sugar's office told the union, "Let's take them to court." Once word got back to the bowling alley owner, he agreed to meet with the lawyers. After hearing what they had to say, he agreed to let blacks bowl at Detroit Recreation.

"It was the first time that Detroit blacks and whites could bowl together in a white-owned alley," says Moore, who still bowls today at age 82.

heated meeting," says the 78-year-old D'Agostino, who remains active today in UAW Retired Worker activities. "The members were very angry that we might take bowling away from them." A local officer had to escort D'Agostino from the meeting to ensure his safety.

Corona and D'Agostino often responded sharply to locals that refused to leave the ABC. "We are not trying to deprive our membership of the right to bowl," D'Agostino wrote one Ohio local. "But we would like them to bowl unsanctioned. How else are we going to break the un-American, un-democratic ABC organization?"

Corona, a Detroit area football star who joined the staff out of Local 400, told another local that segregated bowling was "a low form of union conduct."

Not all responses were negative. UAW Local 230 reported that it had organized an integrated 12-team league that was doing quite well in Los Angeles.

Rather than just ask UAW members to give up bowling, the union went forward with ambitious plans to organize major tournaments around the country.

The first tournament, in Detroit, was the hardest to get going because many bowling alley owners, pressured by the Detroit Bowling Association, refused to let the union use their lanes.

After a long search, the union secured the Eastern Market Rec Center and over 700 UAW members bowled in the first-ever integrated All-American Tournament. Winners split \$1,000 in prize money.

The union went on to hold tournaments in Windsor, Ontario, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, and Minneapolis-St. Paul, concluding with an international tournament back in Detroit, this time at the Dexter Rec Center.

Buffalo was the high mark for the tournaments, says D'Agostino, who gives credit to Ed Gray, later to become director of UAW Region 9. "I'll never forget that," says D'Agostino. "We had the best alley in town, the Amherst Bowling Center."

Gray and other UAW leaders built strong community support for the tournament,

D'Agostino remembers, and 800 bowlers defied ABC threats to bar them from all future competition. The threats proved to be empty.

As soon as the Cleveland Bowling Association pressured the owner of the Franklin Bowling Alley to back out of his agreement with the UAW. The union immediately threatened legal action and the Bowling Association backed off. Tournament participation suffered from the legal tussle, but the union learned a valuable lesson: the ABC was afraid of a lawsuit.

"Everywhere we'd go," says Corona, "we'd hear the same thing from the bowling alley owners: 'If we let them bowl, all the whites will leave. We can't afford it.' We'd tell them that just wasn't going to happen. If guys want to bowl, we said, they're going to bowl."

After the Fair Play in Bowling Committee demands were rejected by the ABC in 1948 and again in 1949, the union put the lesson it had learned in Cleveland to work.

In 1950 an Illinois court ruled in favor of the lawsuit filed by the UAW, NAACP, Steelworkers, and CIO. The ABC was fined \$2,500 and the court threatened to strip away its articles of

incorporation.

The ABC caved in and on August 1, 1950, the "whites-only" clause in its constitution was dropped. The WIBC voted to do the same and, finally, blacks and whites could bowl together under ABC and WIBC sanctions.

That didn't automatically resolve matters, says Madar, even in the UAW. "Bowling alley proprietors—who were the real power behind the ABC—had the rug pulled out from under them and were told to open their doors."

But, it didn't happen overnight. The UAW, for its part, continued to press locals to integrate union teams and continued to hammer away at the bowling alley doors that remained barred to minority bowlers.

Today, bowling remains the most popular recreational activity of UAW members. Close to 10,000 UAW members bowled in regional tournaments leading up to the 1994 UAW International Tournament, and many more bowl in union and recreational leagues across the country—all under democratic policies fought for and won through the efforts of their union almost five decades ago.

Michael Funke