

Live Bait & Ammo #163: Legal Crime

When UAW members at Local 699, the old Saginaw GM Steering Gear, now known as Nexteer, overwhelmingly rejected a concession contract last summer, they had just cause. The new contract would not only create a third tier for new hires, it would provide health care for workers but not their families. The entire contract was downscale, but the treatment of temps and new hires was too cruel and unusual for a union conscience to bear.

The \$5000 signing bonus wasn't worth thirty pieces of silver.

When the UAW International came back with an offer that included health care for every worker's family and permanent status for any worker on his or her ninetieth day, the contract passed. At every contract information meeting, UAW officials emphasized that every worker who punched in on day ninety would be permanent. It was something to hang a union hat on.

Workers weren't happy about making steep concessions, but they could feel proud about standing up for temps and new hires.

Some UAW officials do not value union integrity.

Last week, almost one year to the date that members of UAW Local 699 ratified the local contract which cut them out of the National Agreement and enabled them to be sold to a Chinese investor, the Bargaining Chairman, Bob LaBonte, supported by UAW International Rep, Mike Grimes, signed a Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] allowing the company to hire permanent temps for \$12 an hour, no benefits, and no commitment. The MOU allows the company to maintain 15 percent of the workforce in temporary status forever. Not solidarity forever. Temporary forever.

It may be legal, but it isn't ethical, and it sure as hell isn't union.

Permanent temps is the most dangerous oxymoron in our lexicon. If you think it makes sense, you're ready for the looney bin or a corner office at Solidarity House.

This MOU is anti-union to the core. These temp workers will pay UAW initiation fees and two hours of dues each month as a condition of employment, but they will never gain any benefit from union membership. It appears that the UAW International is doing everything in its power to guarantee that Michigan becomes a Right to Work state.

Permanent temps will surely gain by voting to make Michigan a Right to Work state. They will be glad not to pay dues to a union that treats them like second class citizens. The company may call them temporary but their impact on unions will be permanent.

Plants Four and Five at Nexteer have been designated "Critical Status" on and off and on again for the past three years. That means they have been working mandatory seven days a week. Understaffing is chronic. These new hires are not temporary in any civil or rational sense of the word. They should rightly become permanent UAW members with full benefits. Instead, they are being used and abused with the weak excuse that allowing permanent temps will prevent Alternative Work Schedules. It's a lie.

The fluffy language in the MOU mandating permanent temps does not forbid implementation of Alternative Work Schedules. For example: "All other options such as, but not limited to, . . . where necessary . . . to maximize uptime, should be used." In other words, you're screwed. Management will change the contract whenever they feel like it. The MOU does state that all new work "could require the continued and exclusive use of temporaries . . ."

What does the Chairman get out of it? He gets paid 12-16 hours a day, seven days a week, even when his feet are bare and his best asset is on a deck chair. It's legal crime and the UAW International is responsible for setting up this convenient bribery.

Maybe you don't work in Saginaw. Maybe you think you can look the other way. It has nothing to do with you. Bear in mind the same convenient legal crime is there for your Bargaining Chairperson. There aren't many workers who could turn down \$150,000 plus a year. All he has to do is condemn a few hundred workers to poverty, puff out his chest, and act like a hero.

The UAW International endorsed this treachery. They are setting standards that would make Judas cringe. What happens at Nexteer is the next tier coming to you at Ford, Chrysler, and GM. Traitors don't ask permission, they confiscate it.

The new contract at the GM plant in Lake Orion which expanded second tier members from 20% to 40% conveniently didn't require ratification by the affected members. What do you expect in turn? Democracy? Respect? Solidarity?

The UAW Constitution Article 19 Section 3 says that no UAW official "shall have the authority to negotiate the terms of a contract or any supplement thereof with any employer without first obtaining approval of the Local Union."

So LaBonte and Grimes have you on two counts. It isn't a contract or a supplement thereof, it's an "MOU," a sweetheart deal. And you, the members, aren't the "Local Union." In fact half of the Bargaining Committee who refused to endorse this travesty aren't the "Local Union." Since LaBonte didn't have a majority of his Bargaining Committee on board, he conned The Newberry, Local 699's president, into signing. Trouble is, The Newberry is out of bounds. Presidents don't have the authorization to bargain contracts. Take note: The Newberry's name is not on the 2010 contract.

The whole deal smells like the dump on a hot summer day.

Some UAW members may think that this isn't their business, that it hasn't anything to do with them. Anyone who pays dues to the union has a right to vote on contracts. When these members get their opportunity, they will stab you in the side you deserve. There is nothing temporary about management's intentions. They are setting the union up for another take down. Silence in the face of injustice isn't wise, it's complicity.

Workers who don't protest injustice committed against their fellow workers are guilty of aiding and abetting the crime. I am sure UAW lawyers have sewn all the loopholes together. But workers' rights are not defined by law or contract. Workers' rights are defined by struggle and protest. History is our witness. Justice is our judge.

Union reps like Mike Grimes and Bob LaBonte don't deserve respect, support, or a moment's peace. They despise working people and serve the anti-union cause. They do everything in their power to destroy solidarity and the common decency of working people.

Honorable UAW members in Saginaw are speaking out and LaBonte is fighting back with chop sheets called *Firepower* which slander and vilify committee members who refused to sign the infamous MOU. The title LaBonte chose for his chop sheet is telling. He implies he has the power to fire. Indeed he may since he is on the boss's side.

Members of Local 699 can stop this crap. Demand a special union meeting to reject this MOU and demand that the company honor the contract. Then start a recall campaign.

All other UAW members, get ready. The scumbags are coming. They are disguised as International UAW reps. Don't be fooled. They are working for the company.

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