

## Live Bait & Ammo #133: “They’re Scheming while We’re Dreaming”

Sometimes it gets so bad one can only imagine it will get worse. Many UAW members believe the New GM will cut wages again; Ford will demand more concessions; and Fiat will cannibalize Chrysler.

Workers are not unreasonable. The past has shown that contracts are designed to be broken as soon as they don’t benefit management.

On the other hand, retired salary workers from Delphi have learned that team members are a lower class than union members. The unwritten promise they received in lieu of a contract sheathed a knife — a default dagger that cut out the heart of capital’s most loyal guards.

Who will defend the palace now?

Experience is to education as a lead pipe is to a forehead.

Loyalty to the boss is a patsy’s game. Nobody in the wild world of business does business without a contract except for the patsies who work without a contract.

But what’s a contract without an enforcer?

Fish wrap.

Salary retirees from Delphi have a sound ethical argument but their legal legs are weak in the knees. Attorneys are selling them professional fish wrap disguised as legal advice.

The UAW secured pensions and health care for retirees only because they could enforce the contract with a strike. The court like the corps bows to power not pity. The unorganized get whatever the company is willing to pay and what it’s willing to pay is anything but ethical.

Delphi was designed for bankruptcy. GM switched pension credits from the GM plan to the newly formed Delphi plan. As soon as the spin off was complete, GM pulled the plug. GM canceled contracts with Delphi, resourced with other suppliers, and demanded cuts in prices that forced Delphi to sell below cost. Bankruptcy wasn’t a sign of failure, it was a business plan.

The Delphi fraud — led by a team of former GM executives — enabled General Motors to dump pensions and health insurance for tens of thousands of retirees. Salary retirees from American Axle who had spent the bulk of their career at GM discovered their pensions were lumped into the Delphi plan despite the fact they never worked for Delphi. When they filed a lawsuit, they learned it was “legal”. After all, they were nonunion. They delivered their services without a contract, in which case, paternity does not apply.

The corps and their hired pens are scheming while we’re dreaming. They con employees into calling themselves “team members” instead of union members, and “associates” instead of workers. Corporate think tankers disassociate workers from identity with their class and convince them the conflict between labor and capital is a thing of the past.

The first rule of writing is: *call things by their name*.

The first rule of business is: *confuse the rubes*.

Workers’ rights — whatever their walk of life — are won by struggle not loyalty to the company or its political parties. Which leads us to some relevant questions.

1.) How can we enforce the contract since the UAW gave up the right to strike until 2015?

2.) What’s the advantage of nationalism when the corps are multinational and borders keep unions confined to hostage negotiation (severance) rather than globalization?

Capitulation of the right to strike is not new to the UAW Concession Caucus. They promoted the nationalistic “Buy American” program to union members, but refused to strike over outsourcing. They negotiated company neutrality in card check organizing drives, but gave up the right to strike for a contract once the workforce was organized.

UAW office rats exchanged the walk for the talk and turned contracts into fish wrap. But their own pockets are stuffed with bennies: double pensions, one hundred percent reimbursement for health care, travel expenses, and all the summer vacation they want.

Likewise, politicians wear flag pins and pledge allegiance to lobbyists with the most money. Hence, the US exports jobs and bans the importation of medicine from Canada. Nationalism confines unions to the prison yard, legislates a captive market for drug companies, and gives corporations free rein to trample workers’ rights worldwide.

How is it that when unions form alliances with unions in other countries it's communism, and when corporations invest in China it's free market capitalism? They're scheming while we're dreaming. Rather than calling a spade a spade, they choose to confuse the rubes.

In the worst of times people come together. Unlikely alliances collide and form new constellations of power. Salary workers who witnessed the power of organized labor to protect its members understand the value of unions like never before. At the same time, activists know unions can do better and are busy dismantling the barriers — like nationalism and employment categories — that subdivide workers, tether organizers, and handcuff collective bargaining.

If organized capital can force the government to pay off its gambling debts and open borders to the unregulated flow of capital in pursuit of the lowest wages, than organized labor should likewise cross borders, expand alliances, and force the government to recognize the right of salary workers to unionize in pursuit of happier outcomes than broken promises, foreclosures, and canceled health insurance.

Organized capital advances every time organized labor retreats. Workers at transplants like Toyota and Honda can expect the lead pipe wake-up before the year ends. At which point UAW members can compete for lower wages or reverse the trend.

Where do we begin?

Defend new hires. No more tiers. No more whipsawing. One union, one contract.

We need a National Pattern Contract that covers wages and benefits including supplemental unemployment pay for all autoworkers in both assembly and supply.

A National Pattern Contract would take labor out of the competition. All benefits should be universal and portable and cover all UAW members under the National Pattern Agreement. Furthermore, all UAW members should have preferential hiring and transfer rights to all other companies represented by the UAW regardless of point of entry. Portable benefits and transfer rights would provide a practical incentive for workers to join the UAW.

You don't think nonunion workers would join? Wait till they get the combination wage cut/speed up punch. The school of hard knocks doesn't graduate patsies. But we need a real alternative to attract new members, not fish wrap labeled "local contract with a no strike clause".

To that end the UAW should maneuver the expiration of all UAW contracts to coincide.

Isolated strikes are suicide. Separate and unequal contracts for Ford, Chrysler, GM and every supplier in between undermines collective bargaining. We need one union with one contract.

Whipsawing lowers the standard of living for all workers. If we allow the corps to divide us, isolate us, and treat each local unit, or — as in the case of salary workers — each individual as a separate entity, the corps will continue to drive down wages, benefits, and working conditions. A National Pattern Contract with a National Benefits Fund could give organized labor momentum and open the door to a truly international union response to multinational corporate assaults.

We can't confront organized capital with a working class that is categorically disorganized.

We can't confront multinational corporations with a union confined to local negotiation.

One union, one contract is not optional, it's imperative. The alternative is extinction.

Delphi's salary retirees have confirmed the value of corporate promises and professional fish wrap. Concession after concession has confirmed the value of Selective Bargaining.

"It's time," as Jerry Tucker once said, "to put the backbone back in the UAW." And if the UAW isn't up for a spinal adjustment, it's time to organize a new union based on real union principles: one union, one contract.

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