

## **Live Bait & Ammo #103: When the union turns against you**

I've been quiet since the UAW contracts with GM, Ford, and Chrysler were ratified. I've been quiet but not inactive. I've had my ear to the ground, listening to the sound of a slow train coming.

Workers are stressed. Pressure is relentless. Management adds tasks to jobs already overloaded, speeds up the line, raises rates, runs rampant over work rules, violates seniority rights, disregards production standards, harasses, intimidates, and disciplines. When members call out the union and demand a grievance, more often than not, the rep says, "They can do that. You're lucky to have a job."

I hear from young workers at Delphi earning wages below the industry average who feel passionate about the union. But they report the union doesn't back them up. They feel abandoned. Worse, they feel attacked. "What do you do when the union turns against you?" they ask.

Some of the older workers are resigned to buy outs, but they worry about the future and they feel ashamed of the legacy that's been squandered for the sake of cooperation, jointness, and teamwork. It's apparent that the "corporate restructuring" is not about product, process, or design; it's about breaking the the spirit of unionism and degrading workers. You can retire but you can't hide. The systematic attack on working people isn't a sign of economic recession, but rather regression to an older more vicious time.

The corporations are waging an all out war against workers. We're getting hammered on the shopfloor. And all that Gettelfinger and the Con Caucus can come up with is new ways to surrender.

The UAW International's commitment to corporate restructuring at the expense of workers, both union and non union, is an abdication of the right to represent anyone but their business partners. The deduction of dues from paychecks does not a union make. If Michigan becomes a right to work state, Ron Gettelfinger has no one but himself to blame.

As a former employee of Delphi, I know the cost of restructuring and the toll it takes on workers and their communities. I know how restructuring breaks unions and decimates solidarity. I know who chose to fight, and I know who chose to betray the fight.

In 2003 the Concession Caucus negotiated a two tier supplement at Delphi. Gettelfinger said the two tier wage was needed to make the company competitive and save jobs. Within four years 27,000 out of 33,000 union members were eliminated at Delphi and the remaining workers were brought down to the lower wage and benefit scale.

Gettelfinger & Co. were not deterred. They brought the same contract to GM, Ford, and Chrysler in 2007. Don't be surprised if they open it up for more concessions in 2009. Ronnie's on a roll. On Valentine's Day the Automotive News will host a \$50 a plate dinner to honor the auto companies' favorite sweetheart, the President of the UAW, Ron Gettelfinger. The corpos will be licking their fingers and snickering into their napkins. The captains of industry have good reason to feel delighted.

Contracts negotiated by the Concession Caucus divide and sub divide workers into antagonistic factions: the old and the new, the core and the non core, the active and the retired, the temporary and the permanent. Con Caucus contracts are designed to destroy solidarity. It's no wonder Gettelfinger is the favorite valentine of the corporati.

As the ramifications of the new UAW contracts bulldoze the membership workers will take their vengeance out on Local Union leaders. Anyone who supported this yellow dog contract will be thrown out of office. If you've considered running for Local Union office, beware. Local leaders, however well intended, will become the administrators of a union busting program; the enforcers of core/non core assignments; the excusers of seniority violations; the mollycoddles of a ruthless restructuring. You'll find yourself saying, "I don't like it either, but they can do that. You're lucky to have a job" (for \$14 an hour). One may as well apply for supervisor and try to reform GM from within. Same difference.

The UAW is a one party state hardwired to undermine solidarity, corrupt good unionists, and defend the corporate agenda. If we mistake the Concession Caucus for a legitimate union with workers interests at heart, we'll be led to the slaughter like sheep who are sheared before they are butchered.

Temporary workers at the new GM plant in Lansing, Michigan [Local 602] were convinced (by union & management) they would win permanent jobs if the contract was ratified. Hell yes, they voted yes. After the ratification the Local Union negotiated with management to work the temps until Christmas, and then lay them off permanently. What do you do when the union turns against you?

The entire third shift was eliminated from the GM plant in Lansing despite the fact that GM can't meet demand for the Buick Enclave. Management claims they can't meet demand because they don't have enough parts. Yet parts for the Traverse, the new Chevy crossover that was supposed to be built in Springhill, Tennessee, are being unloaded in Lansing. There's smoke billowing out of Springhill but

union/management deny there is a fire. They're lying. Springhill doesn't have a product. GM is going to close it down, shitcan the Saturn Outlook, and build the Chevy Traverse in Lansing where they are geared to run a three shift operation.

GM with the collaboration of the union eliminated the third shift in Lansing so that temporaries who were promised permanent jobs at top tier wages could be replaced with "non core" new hires making \$14 per hour. Half of the jobs "represented" by Local 602 are designated "non core". There are laid off members from Delphi and Guide and GM who have recall rights to GM. They won't be permitted to take "non core" jobs at top tier wages. What do you do when the union turns against you?

The UAW is a mess. It appears that the Concession Caucus led by Ron Gettelfinger is on the ropes, knees buckling and head spinning. Unless you see it from their perspective —successful implementation of the corporate agenda— in which case they are right on the money. The members may be confused and demoralized but the bureaucracy is progressing rapidly toward the restructuring objective: replace top tier workers with second tier and temporary workers. The transfer of over \$50 billion in legacy wealth earned by workers to Con Caucus control in the form of an unregulated VEBA completes the transaction.

Money doesn't get lost, it changes hands. And when it changes hands, someone has to pay.

The bargaining committee at Freightliner in North Carolina stood up for their members rights. Management fired them. The UAW International put the five fired UAW leaders on trial despite the objections of the Local Union membership [www.Justice4Five.com]. The Local Union found them not guilty, so the International kicked the Freightliner 5 out of the union. What was their crime? Fighting the good fight. The International is bent on destroying Local Union leaders who resist the corporate agenda.

UAW members who are laid off or on disciplinary leave, should be alerted that they must notify the Local Union Financial-Secretary IN WRITING that they are eligible for good standing without payment of dues. Otherwise, you will be removed from the roster after six months. [UAW Constitution, Article 16, Section 19]. You must do this every month thereafter. Because if you are not a member in good standing, the union can drop your grievance and no one will find the body. The Con Caucus isn't interested in retaining members, they are cleaning house for their business partners. Every top tier worker is on the tip of the broom and headed for the dust bin.

What do you do when the union turns against you?

Collective action outside the corral of the compromised grievance procedure is our only recourse. Bullies don't deserve courtesy. Traitors don't deserve respect. When union/management run over the work rules, show contempt for the Local Union, and wipe their feet on retirees, there are no rules of engagement to uphold.

My people have an old saying, "If you haven't quit fighting, you aren't defeated."

Who are "my people" ?

My people are black and white, old and young, men and women, communists and republicans. In sum, people of all persuasions united by one common bond —the old religion. Not the Con Caucus genuflection to the idol of competitiveness, but the old fashion shoulder to shoulder, back to back, worker to worker solidarity that won everything that Gettelfinger & Co. betrayed.

We're all in this kettle together. Every working person is our natural ally. Senior workers have an obligation to defend new hires. We gave them the broken legacy of two tier and it's our job to amend it. Bring them up or they will bring us down.

Retired UAW members were essential to our success in maintaining lines of communication during the resistance to the national contracts. They can teach, they can guide, and they can sometimes carry out tasks too risky or time consuming for active workers to engage in. Retirees know that stabbing new hires in the back jeopardizes every union member, active or retired. The Con Caucus negotiated takeaways from retirees once, and they will do it again. The door is wide open. Only active workers can close it. Raise the new hires up, or they will tear us all down.

New workers have an obligation as well. They are the future of the union, the real union, and as such they have an obligation to keep the old religion alive.

As I listen to the rumblings on the shop floor, I recall that I've felt overwhelmed and under siege before. But however steep the odds, I never felt alone. My people will never stop fighting. Deep in their bones they know there's no seniority date for dignity and no retirement from solidarity.

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