

Live Bait & Ammo #107: Double the Strike Pay, Triple the Take

The Concession Caucus may have overplayed their hand. In defense of the status quo the Cons are willing to sacrifice workers for the sake of corporate profits. But after four, five, six weeks on strike, there is too much on the table to tolerate whatever goes on underneath.

Workers can't afford to fold. If the International comes back with a lowball offer, the rank and file is likely to cram it down their throats. Deep. And then there will be scores to settle and promises to keep. Betrayal has its costs.

The Cons are well aware that management likes to throw money at problems. American Axle workers can expect a buy off is in the cards.

At Delphi management studied the demographics. They knew that if they met the fundamental needs—pension and health care—of the majority of workers, they could break the resistance. After that it was easy to close plants and buy down the remaining seniority members relatively cheap.

The Con Caucus had already negotiated the essentials of Delphi's post bankruptcy contract with a supplemental agreement in 2004. But the "Supplement" wasn't ratified until July 2007 after the buy outs and buy downs were brought in to sweeten the medicine.

At GM, Ford, and Chrysler UAW members were spared a wage cut by selling out the next generation with "non-core two-tier". The trade off gave the rats a chance to abandon ship. Too bad there's not a safe harbor. Retirement incentives will look like chump change in a few years, but that's how "goes-around-comes-around" justice works.

Retired or not we all have a vested interest in what happens at American Axle because whatever deal they get, we can expect at GM, Ford, and Chrysler in 2011.

Weigh the consequences: a weak union equals an insecure retirement. All UAW members have a lot on the line in this strike.

If a profitable company like American Axle can break the union down further, and impose deep concessions including outsourcing to a non union American Axle plant in Michigan, we can expect no less in 2011 at GM, Ford, and Chrysler.

But rest assured, there will be no buy offs or buy downs in 2011. Second tier workers will compose a majority in the new demographic. And they will expect their turn on the merry-go-round that passes for justice in this dog eat dog system. You see, betrayal isn't free. Two tier guarantees the victims a chance to get even.

The strike at American Axle should have been waged at GM. Donations from GM workers to strikers at American Axle aren't charity or even solidarity: it's a debt. Instead of \$200 a week strike pay, GM workers are collecting unemployment and sub pay, and in most cases full wages.

Want to show resolve? The UAW should double the strike pay this week and triple it next week on top of bucket collections at the gates of every UAW represented plant. We should let Dick Dauch know that 73,600 GM workers are happy to support 3,600 strikers and 173,600 retirees remember where they came from.

Whether you are laid off or retired, showing up on the line is a wise investment of time. And if you are still working, it's time to observe the rules real closely. Dig deep into your pockets, and think about what this strike will cost us all if poverty forces your brothers and sisters to cross the line.

The fate of American Axle workers is our fate. We better hope they call the bluff.

We all better hope the UAW shows some backbone.

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