

Live Bait & Ammo #126: Business-as-usual Unionism is Dead

The crisis in auto isn't quarantined in Detroit. Every manufacturer in the US is afflicted. Likewise, the crisis in the UAW isn't restricted. All workers and retirees, union and nonunion alike, are impacted by unemployment, falling wages, insufficient health care, and social insecurity.

Business-as-usual unionism is dead. Any bargaining goal short of victory for all is an injury to workers everywhere.

Now is an opportune time for the UAW to "step up to the plate," as Gettelfinger likes to say, and demand a solution that benefits all workers, their families, their neighbors, and their employers. The era of bargaining for segregated privilege is over. A government subsidy for Big Three retirees, as Gettelfinger suggested in his Washington Times op ed, is socially irresponsible, economically unfeasible, and politically dead on arrival. [Reviving the Domestic Auto Industry-Washington Times:2-22-09]

Gettelfinger's whim fails on two counts: (1) to galvanize the unorganized (2) to aid manufacturers struggling to survive.

The UAW is in a unique position to leverage a practical solution to an urgent need. The fulcrum is production. The power to produce is an economic fundamental our country can ill afford to ignore. Health care reform, not concessions, is pivotal to industrial revival.

Manufacturing in the US doesn't suffer from a lack of skill or productivity. It suffers from a pandemic patchwork of lame excuses for health insurance. Our major competitors were never burdened with an albatross that compares to the private insurance rackets strangling American business. The notion that a federal subsidy for the Detroit Three can waylay the reckoning is naive.

Our unhealthy dependence on private insurance not only strangles businesses, big and small, but city councils, county commissions, boards of education, and entire state budgets as well.

Workers and retirees all across the nation need a union leader with the guts to say, "No amount of concessions by workers will save manufacturing in the US. We demand that Congress pass a universal single payer health plan. A plan that emulates the best practices of all our major competitors. A plan that puts the best interests of all Americans ahead of special interests. A plan that will restore the competitiveness of our manufacturing sector and provide a broad and diverse base of employment opportunities for everyone."

The important question isn't how much it will cost, but rather how much it will save and how fast we can save ourselves from the private insurance drain on our economy.

John Conyers' bill, HR-676, will provide cost effective universal single payer health care.

The savings are three pronged. Employers will save, workers will save, and health care providers will be saved from scaling the ramparts of paperwork erected by insurance companies that maximize profit by obstructing coverage.

The automakers' major competitive disadvantage is legacy costs. HR-676 will level the playing field. Workers will gain both earning power and bargaining power. Quality and efficiency will improve as doctors spend more time treating disease rather than navigating the commercial reefs of private insurance. Everyone will benefit. HR-676 even provides for workers displaced from insurance companies.

HR-676 will stimulate the economy not only by putting more disposable income in workers' pockets and investment dollars in manufacturers' budgets, but also by creating jobs as demand for primary health care increases.

We've been indoctrinated by the insurance lobby into believing that more access to health care will drive costs up and the quality of care down. The fact is, the only health care criteria in which the United States leads is cost. Our competitors cover more people for less money and outperform us in every qualitative measure of health. Private insurance, not medical expertise, is the debilitating factor.

Private insurers have a profit motive to limit choices and access to health care. Private insurers have a profit motive to layer health care costs with administrative fees and luxurious salaries. Private insurers have a profit motive to persuade us that treating patients at the most cost effective point of intervention—primary care—rather than at the most expensive point—emergency rooms—is inefficient and morally hazardous. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We've been duped. We pay more, we get less, and manufacturing in the US has been mortally wounded in the process. We need one nation with one health care plan. We need one union to step up to the plate and say we won't back down until every man, woman, and child has equal access to the health care they deserve.

Despite double lip service about the need for universal health care, the Gettelfinger Administration has not endorsed HR-676. Manufacturing in the US can't thrive without relief from the unaffordable burden of private health insurance. The VEBA deal is kaput. Demand that your UAW representatives do the right thing. Endorse HR-676 and dedicate our collective resources to its success.

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The resolution below could be modified or simplified but it covers the basic points. If rank & file members can submit this to their Local Unions, it will show support for Conyers' plan.
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UAW Local _____ Resolution on National Health Care

WHEREAS: The UAW International UAW Constitutional Conventions have, over a number of years, vigorously endorsed the concept of a Universal, Comprehensive, Single-Payer Health Care System in the United States and reaffirmed that endorsement at our most recent Constitutional Convention in 2007, and;

WHEREAS: No union today can effectively engage in collective bargaining without facing concession demands or hard choices regarding health care coverage in our contracts. The absence of a universal health care system and disproportionate costs of health insurance at the bargaining table has significantly depressed our member's wages despite the productivity gains their work has produced, and;

WHEREAS: now the negotiated healthcare coverage of all UAW Big 3 Auto retirees and active workers is at risk of being stripped away, despite all the years of wage hour contributions and wage deferrals we have made to provide it as a lifetime benefit. And, in recognition that the only a National Healthcare Plan, as embodied in HR 676 introduced by Michigan Congressman John Conyers, can truly provide the coverage to protect our families in this time of crisis and economic turmoil, and;

WHEREAS: forty-seven million other Americans, including 15 million children, are without health insurance and millions more, a majority of whom are employed, are underinsured; and

WHEREAS: H.R. 676 is the only current proposal which will provide a cost-effective, single-payer system which continues to protect the free choice of physicians and comprehensive prescription drug coverage to seniors, and

WHEREAS: numerous labor bodies from all across the country have launched a renewed grassroots labor campaign to bring about the enactment of H.R. 676, often called the "Medicare for All" Bill, there is just cause for this UAW Local Union to join in the effort to build and support that campaign and to recommend it to all of our retired and active members.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that UAW Local _____ reaffirms our International Union's full support a Single-Payer healthcare solution and acknowledges that H. R. 676 "The Medicare for All National Health Care Act" is the only pending legislation that provides that solution. We enthusiastically endorse HR 676 and will participate and promote the upcoming national meeting to develop a national grassroots labor campaign for its passage into law.

Fraternally submitted: _____

For more information on HR-676 go to:

- http://www.laborforsinglepayer.org/
- http://www.johnconyers.com/healthcare
- http://www.pnhp.org/