

Live Bait & Ammo #130: When Workers Lead the Way

The most important repercussion of the GM/Chrysler bankruptcies will be the formation of a new union. Obama fired the CEO of General Motors, but he decertified the UAW. There's nothing as hopeful as a plowed field.

An arbitrator, rather than collective bargaining, will determine the next UAW contract with the Detroit Three. Per the UAW-GM-Chrysler 2009 Agreements, the arbitrator's benchmark is parity with nonunion transplants. The UAW is effectively debarred.

Let's be clear on this point: UAW officials are not the victims of government interference, we are. The UAW Concession Caucus always acted like the only downside to their job was representing members. Gettelfinger probably suggested that the government appoint an arbitrator so office rats could concentrate on their golf.

When the Con Caucus Rep at one information meeting was asked what bargaining leverage we would have without the right to strike, the Con told him,

"Strikes are a thing of the past. We can bargain in good faith."

A second Con jumped to the mic with the Highlights in one hand and pounded the podium, "This is our ticket, our chance to live to fight another day."

The crowd grumbled. Fight with what? Our hankies?

When the Cons were asked if members would be allowed to vote in 2011, one Con said,

"Of course."

"What happens if we vote it down?"

"Then it goes to an arbitrator."

According to the podium pounding Highlights, members will get a chance to vote but if they don't approve of "wage and benefit improvements based on maintaining an all-in labor cost comparable to its US competitors including transplant automotive competitors" an arbitrator will impose the nonunion standard and the Con Caucus reps will bow out "in good faith". Holy sheep.

UAW members at the Detroit Three will be no better off than nonunion workers in 2011. They will not be bound with golden handcuffs to UAW contracts. They'll take pay cuts. Pensions will be frozen and thirty-and-out abandoned. That's not opinion, it's what "maintaining all-in labor cost comparable to its US competitors" means. We'll live to fight another day, but it won't be under the leadership of the UAW Concession Caucus.

The gloves are off. The 2009 contract was ratified under duress. The 2011 contract will be imposed without a legitimate vote of the membership. That's not union, that's indentured servitude. I would not want to be in the shoes of the next UAW office rat who tells a lineworker he's lucky to have a job.

The banksters who destroyed the economy with criminal negligence and reckless indifference were not forced to make concessions. They didn't lose bonuses or retirement packages. Their contracts are sacred.

But retirees who purchased a health care plan with 30 years of hard labor and COLA diversions don't have a contract that the government respects because the government doesn't respect labor. And members who pay union dues don't have reps that the company respects because the government has outlawed collective bargaining for autoworkers at GM and Chrysler.

The US government gave Chrysler, an American icon and the creator of Jeep, to an Italian company for no money down. The US government sponsored the GM scheme to import cars so they could compensate for plant closings in America. A wino could come up with a better plan.

Ikki Yamakawa, a reporter from Japan's largest daily newspaper, interviewed me in my home. I asked him if the Japanese government would ever pay Toyota to close factories in Japan, ship the means of production to Indonesia, and import the autos back to Japan for sale. He didn't answer me. He just laughed.

Americans are suckers. Everybody knows it.

In the US we don't protect manufacturing, but we zealously protect the health insurance industry, a money sucking parasite whose only product is paperwork. GM claims that health care costs more per car than steel: an estimated \$1,500 per vehicle and climbing. Rather than change to a

more efficient single payer system, our government helps companies export jobs to countries that already have national health care. The financial wizards never miss an opportunity to compound the trade imbalance.

Recently I encountered some Tea Partiers at a protest. They despise the government but they were all waving American flags. One vocally gifted TP chanted, "Power to the people. Power to the people. Right on." They were protesting health care reform. They didn't want it. One TP held a sign that read: "Go to high school. Get a job. Buy your own health care."

These are confusing times. Folks are angry. We have a legitimate reason to distrust the government, the corporations, and the unions. When our fellow workers in the Tea Party discover that a high school diploma won't land a job that can pay for health care, they're going to need a plan.

A confrontation is in order. Power to the people is in order. A summit where we can discuss an Economic Policy for We the People is in order.

Necessity, not philosophy, drives change. We won't get change by whining. We won't get change by waiting for Congress to pass laws that make union organizing safe. We won't get change waiting for the lady in waiting, UAW V.P. Bob King, to remember where he came from. We won't get change following rules designed to keep us pacified and powerless.

We'll get change when Congress is afraid to pass laws that hurt working people. We'll get change when Bob King can't forget where he came from because he's back on the line wishing he had an extra six minutes of break time. We'll get change when UAW members overthrow the Concession Caucus by force. We'll get change when we break all the rules that keep us chained to the heart attack machine that cranks money out of poverty, illness, and war.

We'll get change, real change, when workers lead the way.

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Come to the Peoples Summit June 14-17, Grand Circus Park in Detroit to counter the National Business Summit at the Renaissance Center. See old friends and meet new friends. We will share food, laughs, and ideas about how we can fight to win. We will protest economic terrorism, confront the bosses, and celebrate solidarity.

Rally for Jobs Tuesday, June 16, 2009 – 12:00 Noon at GM Headquarters

GM and Chrysler are using tens of billions of dollars in government funds to shut plants and layoff tens of thousands of workers. American Axle announced it will close its Detroit plant and shift production to nonunion plants in the US and Mexico. Scores of other suppliers will follow in their wake. Demand an end to federally subsidized offshoring and union busting.

The bosses and the bankers, not workers, caused this economic crisis. Why should workers be punished? When Wall St. goes bust, it's an emergency. When workers go bust, it's pull up your bootstraps. Government funds should not be wasted on incompetent management and fraudulent financiers. We need a national industrial policy. Retool the plants—the once vaunted "arsenal of democracy"—for products that promote environmental integrity and energy independence. Full employment is a workable reality. Solidarity is a practical solution. Don't let bankers have the last word. Make yourself heard at the People's Summit.

Visit the web site at www.peoplessummit.org or call 313-887-4344 for more information.