

Live Bait & Ammo # 134: Welcome to Juarez

“where the cops don’t need you and man they expect the same” *Dylan

In *Juarez, the Laboratory of our Future* [1998] Charles Bowden quoted Nicholas Steele, former head of Ford in Mexico as he gushed admiration for the Mexican government’s control of workers: “But is there any other country in the world,” Steele said, “where the working class.....took a hit in their purchasing power of in excess of 50 percent over an eight-year period and you didn’t have a social revolution?”

We are about to find out. In 2007 UAW members took a 50% cut in pay for new hires at the Big Three automakers. In 2009 the UAW gave up cost of living raises, annual performance bonuses, and the right to strike. The domino that went down in Juarez is cascading through North America.

For twenty-plus years foreign automakers in the US pegged compensation at rates that discouraged union organizing, but that benchmark is rolling in the dirt and UAW office rats are running for cover beneath the skirts of Wall Street’s whores — lawyers, politicians, and Chief Executive Officers.

Maybe you haven’t paid attention to the mayhem coming out of Juarez, that bright city on the hill that held out the promise of a new century of progress, but it’s hard not to notice the dislocated anger massing at the gates of shuttered factories in the north. It’s hard to ignore the plight of retirees whose future foreclosed while congress fiddled with health care reform and sheltered economic terrorists from harm. It’s hard to turn your head when your child is facing a dead end job market. It’s hard to pretend hard times is someone else’s load when “the vagabond who’s rapping at your door is standing in the clothes that you once wore.” *

Instead of a national strike, we stuck it to the next generation of workers: low wages, no cost of living adjustment, no pension, no health care in retirement, and bootlicking union offs eager to do the boss’s dirty work.

No one is coming to save us. And the victims won’t be eulogized as heroes in some patriotic songbook with a picture of the Alamo on the cover and punchy blurbs from “union friendly” politicians on the dust jacket. Labor’s war memorial will be a white flag embossed with tire tracks.

The president of Toyota said the weak U.S. currency made it difficult to return to profit on an unconsolidated level. "When you get to this level, it makes it difficult to return to profit on sales growth alone," he said. That means wage cuts for workers at Toyota. That means plant closings, layoffs, and speedups for workers at Toyota. And that means the next UAW contract — preset to match Toyota — will be worse than the last unless the rank & file sandbags the office rats and retirees crash the 2010 Con Con in Detroit with overwhelming force.

We can do that.

We’ve got the numbers and we’ve got the bayonet of greed pointed at our backs. They’ve already drained pension funds and 401-k’s. They’ve crippled health care reform and torpedoed VEBAs. If you haven’t suffered foreclosure, you’ve lost half your equity. Everyone can see where this is going. Vultures are circling the car crash.

The price of oil can only rise as sources deplete and China and India demand their fair share. Our economy runs on oil, not credit cards. And since the dollar hasn’t gained real value in thirty-eight years, what can workers expect from the bosses? Bonuses? Raises? Vacation pay?

Frank Hammer put the countersink to the last nail in the coffin of nationalism when he said, “With the expansion of globalization, we are all foreign workers.”

Welcome to Juarez.

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