

Live Bait & Ammo #145: Buck the Bulls. Get Union.

What's the worst thing that can happen if UAW members don't pass a concession contract? Well, in the case of GM parts workers, the worst that can happen if they don't pass the Con's con is: they get a 3.75% raise retroactive to January 4, 2010. They get to keep all their holidays including the extra day on Easter. They get to keep full SUB pay benefits without reduction for 156 weeks, and a \$40,000 severance package.

What's the best that can happen if they pass the Con's con? Here's the moldy carrot: they lose the 3.75% raise. They lose holidays. SUB pay is reduced. The severance gets clipped to \$10,000. And everybody scores a pay cut. In Con Caucus jargon that's call a win-win because the only losers are the dues paying members and they don't count.

The most obvious con is the severance reduction. The only reason the company wants a severance reduction is if they intend to close, subcontract, or resource products elsewhere. Workers would be crazy to ratify a reduction in severance at a time like this. It only encourages the company to eliminate work or close the plant on the cheap. Might as well make it expensive as severance does not effect competitiveness.

According to a Local 1097 Chairman Report in Rochester, NY there isn't even a promise of new work, a suckers bonus, or "equality of sacrifice". (Salary will keep their pay raise, thank you.)

Now some plants may get a promise of new work but "Promises," as my old friend Jimmy Jean likes to say, "are like deer prints. They're exciting, but when you fry them up they don't amount to a forkful."

I think we've all bitten that empty fork enough times to know that the promise to keep a plant open isn't worth a possum's footprint let alone a buck's. "New work" invariably means, "Shut the door on your way out," cause the only place you will find new work is somewhere else.

Some plants may get a suckers bonus. Bear in mind, whatever they give upfront, they take double out the back. It's a time worn formula. A cost of living raise compounds year after year. A suckers bonus disappears. That's why the Cons call it a suckers bonus behind your backs.

At the Grand Rapids plant management is setting up small departmental information meetings to lessen the influence of outspoken workers and augment the impression of management control. The power point and the rush job is typical of all cons. For the record: Fast Eddie DiEnno is not your friend. He just wants your lunch money.

I think we all know by now that when the union holds a meeting on company time with the boss in charge and union "leaders" agreeing to everything Fast Eddie says, the office rats have been bought off. GM and the UAW Concession Caucus led by Cal Rapson have crossed the line. Members should be filing charges against the UAW and GM for running a company union.

Case in point: the company violates the contract and the union changes the contract to cover for the boss. That's Mafia unionism. It's not only vile, ugly, and repulsive, it's unlawful.

If, for example, you are forced to work the contractual holiday after Easter, a legitimate union would file a grievance for double time and an additional ATO day. A Mafia union would say, "They can do that. You better not cause trouble." That's not sound advice, it's criminal behavior.

The Cons contend that since GM bought the company from Delphi UAW members must change their contract to comply with management's demands. It's a lie. A federal appeals court recently upheld a lawsuit by the UAW against Boeing for denying contractual benefits under the pretext that the contract was void as a result of the sale to a different company.

"The U.S. federal Court of Appeals Thursday affirmed an arbitration decision that means production workers at Boeing's former manufacturing plants in Oklahoma are entitled..." to the terms of the contract.

"Boeing argued the obligation was terminated by the sale to Spirit. The UAW appealed and an arbitrator ruled in the union's favor."

"...Boeing is stuck with the commitments," the court ruled. "It was not required to provide lifetime benefits to workers represented by the UAW, but it agreed to do so and must live with its decision." ["Boeing loses appeal" by Dominic Gates, Seattle Times, 3-19-10]

The UAW Concession Caucus wants it both ways. They insist that parts workers comply

with the national pattern and they insist that parts workers break with the national pattern. If it sounds confusing, it's because the Cons have some teeth missing from their cog wheels. If you're going to listen to their logic, you may as well guzzle gin straight from the bottle.

In 2003 the GM-UAW Locals voted to give Delphi workers a two tier wage. The Cons justified this gerrymander by saying we were one union and the separate companies had "mirror agreements". In 2010 the Cons want to play the mirror trick all over again. Bob King has perverted the strategy of pattern bargaining to degrade contracts. He substitutes nose dive for negotiation and calls it, "Live to fight another day." How about we fight to live another day by voting NO and then fight to support our families better in 2011 when we will be in a stronger position to bargain?

If GM parts workers follow the pattern of Ford workers and vote this concession contract down, the union will have two forces of workers ready to negotiate for real in 2011. Ford workers and GM parts workers could raise the expectations for all workers.

King is scared and he should be. There's a Constitutional Convention coming in June and many union members despise him. He was booed and shunned by Ford workers at his home plant in Dearborn when he tried to persuade them (on company time) to vote for more concessions.

A lot of UAW members want to decertify the UAW because workers do not feel represented, in fact, they feel that UAW reps are working for the company. The key word is "represent". Americans don't want direct democracy, they want to be represented.

As long as union members' principle desire is to be represented, they are going to be sadly disappointed. A union, a real union, is an engine of collective action. And collective action is bigger than any leader, let alone a rear door rep dedicated to keeping secrets and manipulating members.

Back in the day, union officials did what workers told them to do because they feared the collective action of workers. Now they take directions from the boss.

Real unionism isn't about representatives, it's about turning reps into stewards of the people instead of tools of the company. Real unionism is workers taking control of the shopfloor and the union hall. Real unionism is direct action guided by the law of "protected concerted activity."

The answer isn't decertification. The answer is ACT like a UNION, that is, collectively. Don't go to the front office alone. Go to the front office with your whole department, your whole shift. Don't go to the union meeting alone. Go to the meeting with a gang and demand change.

The UAW International are a bunch of company whipped pansies. Why should anybody respect them? They cannot be trusted. Nobody elected them. Which is why they should not be allowed to administer the ratification procedure or count the votes. Don't let them push you around.

A real union, as opposed to people who just want to be represented, which is a polite word for screwed, would have the election committee run the ratification vote, post challengers at the polls to monitor the procedure, and station rank & file workers to validate the count and make sure the Cons don't switch the ballots.

A loyal bargaining committee member would pass a copy of the full agreement to SOS so we could put it online for all members to read in its entirety. A trustworthy union president would delay the ratification vote for at least ten days, so members would have time to evaluate, debate, and decide for themselves what's best for their union. It can be done.

In 2003 UAW Local 2151 President Rob Betts delayed the vote on the national contract for two weeks. Of course he took some heat from the company whipped pansies, but what is heat from a patsy compared to an outraged rank & file or one's own sense of integrity? Local 2151 voted that yellowdog two-tier contract down two to one.

Real unionism like real democracy is hard work. It's easier to get represented. But like brother Al McKinnis said, "If someone tells you he is your leader, you know he is your enemy."

There is nothing the company would like better than for members to decertify the union. Buck the bulls. Don't get represented, get union.

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