

Live Bait & Ammo #167: Deconstructing the UAW

It would take a sleuth with a corkscrew brain to lathe his way through the twisted scheme that leads to a broken union, aka, the UAW. There's fingerprints, traces of blood, a smoking gun, and hundreds of witnesses, but alas, no arrests. As usual, the UAW spokesperson takes the Fifth, "No comment," and the company in charge—peering over the wreckage—just shrugs like Ayn Rand's Atlas before he makes another killing. At UAW headquarters, it's business as usual: officers dine on pork chops while new members apply for food stamps.

Like Jack Webb always said, "Just the facts, Ma'am." Who, what, when, where, why, and how in the hell did the victim get blamed for his own wound?

Every bloodhound begins where the odor is strongest (Ford) and then follows the trail.

When Ford spun off its parts division, Visteon, in 1999 the company promised workers they would be Ford employees for life. Their pension, benefits, wages, and other amenities would remain the same as *non spun off* workers. New hires? That's another story. New hires would take one blow to the kidney, another below the belt, and work right along side the Blue Oval elite like nothing ever happened between bells. What the hell, the palookas had jobs, didn't they? They should be happy as slaves in a bygone Dixie.

Before long, one union, the UAW, had two separate but *unequal* contracts covering workers who did the same work at the same pace at the same aforementioned place—Visteon—under a new alias: Automotive Components Holdings [ACH].

The ACHtung regime came with new imperatives and new labels. Blue Coats were traditional Ford employees. Orange Coats were new hires. The difference wasn't merely color and wages, it was treatment. Blue Coats have a national contract. Orange Coats have never seen the contract that governs every working day of their lives. Blue Coats have rights and privileges. Orange Coats are subject to the whim and whip of the boss.

The bosses were having a heyday but the thrashing had just begun. ACH was formed in 2005 when the bankruptcy of Visteon threatened the supply of critical parts to Ford. ACH is owned and managed by Ford and represented by the UAW. The mission of the holding company is to prepare the plants for sale or closure while ensuring that Ford gets all the parts it needs at discount prices. [http://media.ford.com/article_display.cfm?article_id=21687]

One may wonder, did this strategy really have the union's support?

"Yes. The UAW's support helped Ford reach an agreement with Visteon that paved the way for ACH's formation, and that support has continued. The new owners will work directly with the UAW on local agreements and pay structures for new hires."

[http://media.ford.com/article_display.cfm?article_id=21794]

As the auto market nose dived from 2005 to 2010 staff thrashing intensified. Some Blue Coats were given the option to transfer to ACH plants "temporarily." Trouble is, when the hostile environment of a two tier plant became too hot, these "light" Blue Coats found they couldn't transfer back to their home plant until there were openings. Of course, openings at their home plant were filled by new hires at second tier wages with the support of the UAW. When these same Blue Coats dug in for the long haul at ACH and decided to run for elective office, they were told they couldn't because they were temps. Hence the Light Blue Coat label which shaded their rights and privileges with a miscreant tint.

As the thrashing machination cycled through the parts plants Ford announced the closure of the Twin Cities Assembly plant which built the popular Ranger pickup. Consequently, Ford, with the support of the UAW, pressured Blue Coats to transfer or retire, then staffed the plant with temporary workers at discount wages and bennies. Then Ford decided to keep the plant open a little longer and hired newbies at wages below the temp standard. On top of that, Ford, with the blessing of the UAW, rehired retired skilled trades workers through a separate contractor and thereby retained experienced trades at discount prices. Four years later the plant is still humming. Ford continues to announce the closing at regular intervals but at these rates temps, second tier new hires, and de-unionized trades are padding Mulally's parachute with gold leaf and silver linings. Who knows? The Twin Cities plant may get another reprieve, a transient product for the time being and some day, baby, who knows, maybe, we'll all be permanently temporary.

Meanwhile, back in Flat Rock, Michigan the Mazda-Ford dalliance, Auto Alliance International [AAI], with the support of the UAW had already achieved most of the outsourcing of non core jobs. Nevertheless, in June 2011 Mazda announced that they were going to end production at AAI where Ford also builds the Mustang. Thus, Ford would be forced to reconsider whether they would keep the plant open without their foreign paramour. Then Mazda informed employees that they were committed to providing a new product for AAI but—surprise, surprise—accommodations would be necessary. Of course, this latest round of concession thrashing on behalf of Ford-Mazda comes with the support of the UAW and the crack of a whipsaw.

Any Columbo wannabe worth his per diem would have to inquire which UAW leader aided and abetted Ford's dismemberment of the union at these sundry yet eerily similar scenes of iniquity and debasement. Just the facts.

The one and only Bob King was head of the UAW-Ford Department and Independent Parts Suppliers [IPS] during the most degenerate union negotiations since . . . Hell, I can't think of a traitor who doesn't pale in comparison. But now King is president of the UAW and he is eager to demonstrate that the UAW has been a vital partner in the de-structuring of the auto union for the benefit of US corporations.

If King can wind up current negotiations with the Detroit Three with a third tier wage, defanged trades, and a cash balance pension plan which will set the standard below the transplant competition, he may get a seat on the Board of Directors and a good shot at some insider trading.

King contends he can organize employers easier than workers because he and his corporate comrades are of the same mind set. Namely, profit is the fundamental value and workers should pay for it by sacrificing annual raises and cost of living adjustments for profit sharing schemes.

I'm betting King won't make another appearance at his home local in Dearborn where he was booted out the door [<http://www.blueovalforums.com/forums/index.php?/topic/35751-bob-king-dearborn/>]. His working class hero cape won't fly on the shop floor. And he knows it.

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