

# Live Bait & Ammo #185: Protect and Serve

"It's police unions that are the problem," my friend said, "Ask any mayor, they'll tell you." Which is to say, just ask the boss.

Of course, if you ask the boss, it's always the union's fault. Whether it's teachers, letter carriers, or autoworkers, it's the union, not management's fault. Reminds me of that feckless leader who said, "I'm in charge. I don't take responsibility," without blinking.

Unions negotiate wages, benefits, working conditions, and yes, they have a legal obligation to defend members in disciplinary hearings. But contractually, who makes policy? Who gives orders? Who is in charge?

What union contract puts workers in charge of the show? Okay, stage hands. But other than those rascals?

Management always reserves the "right to manage." (In UAW-GM contracts it's "paragraph 8.") The right to manage is sacrosanct in every management/union contract. Do police unions decide City or State policies? Police don't strike. They may catch the blue flu. They may work to rule, but legally they can't strike. How can union members dictate employer policy?

The question should be: Does the Mayor's Office, the Prosecutor's Office, the City Council, actually have an adversarial relationship with the police union? Is there a legally binding conflict of interest between the two parties? Or do they negotiate like the UAW Staff Union with the UAW International, which is to quote a phrase, "at arm's length." Which is to say, let's pretend to disagree so we don't appear to be collaborators, mutual benefactors, con artists, swindlers of the rank and file.

Every union has the duty to represent a union member in a disciplinary interview and the union negotiates a fair practice guideline for discipline which includes arbitration. But the criminal justice system is a unique organization. There's an entire prosecutor apparatus which can press charges to the full extent of the law. A contract can not supersede the law. What does it mean when police are not criminally charged for criminal behavior? Doesn't that imply union-management collusion?

If there's public uproar, there will be an internal investigation and the standard operating procedure is delay and postpone until the news-cycle has ground the tears of public conscience into dust. Thus, the legitimate question is: what is the partnership between union and management in the criminal justice system? Did the union invent Broken Windows Policing? Which has nothing to do with repairing windows and everything to do with incarcerating poor people.

In 1982 James Q. Wilson and George Kelling wrote an article in *The Atlantic* which became the bible of policing. The story line begins with abandoned property and

proceeds to assumptions on parenting and poverty and crime rather than how the preeminent situation—abandoned property—may acquire socially redeeming value. Because like an old judge once said, “I know pornography when I see it.”

The perpetrators of aggressive policing describe the end results of Capital’s creative destruction which is desperation and despair. Their prescription is Stop and Frisk, which is an assumption of guilt by presence in the vicinity of poverty, and incarceration for petty infractions, which amounts to oppression of the poor—the victims of Capital’s creative destruction.

Do the corporations who have abandoned Detroit take any responsibility for their destructive actions? Who pays for toxic clean-up, economic starvation, the scars on the landscape of cities some people call home? Who pays the human price of the opioid crisis? Are the corporate perpetrators arrested? Or the victims? The families? And who is assigned the ugly job of incarcerating sick people? Why police instead of health care workers who are trained to take care of sick, suffering people?

There’s an urgent push by neoliberals to attack unions, rather than address the systemic causes of poverty, destitution, crime, addiction, and police brutality. Neoliberals accuse unions in order to distract blame for their own nefarious behavior.

For instance, neoliberals want to dismantle the US Post Office, sell the profitable parts of the postal service to private investors, and strap the postal unions with tasks private enterprise disdains. Neoliberals want to privatize wealthy public schools and leave the teachers unions to work with disadvantaged youth in the deindustrialized desolation of a condemned corridor patrolled by police in military gear. Neoliberals want police to do social work and mental health work. Tasks they were never trained for.

There’s a pattern of immoral clarity in this neoliberal scheme. One can see the forest though the trees, but who can see the criminal intent through the smoke screen of blame? Neoliberals have leveraged an assault on working families that has ravaged communities; gutted pensions; napalmed jobs; sliced, diced, and decimated wages; strip-mined FHA mortgages; pilfered student debt; privatized all profit and socialized all losses; rendered capital gains into tax deductible charitable deductions; granted vulture capitalists qualified immunity; and turned US law enforcement into a casino racket.

The *Onion* headline, “Protesters Criticized for Looting Without Forming a Private Equity Firm First” is no joke. It’s a placard of truth plastered over a farce.

The pertinent question is: who will union members, police or otherwise, accept a partnership with? Will workers accept partnerships made with business moguls by bought-off union officials? Or will they strive for solidarity with other workers like themselves?

Will union members strive to build a collective force to defend their own interests in league with the community to whom they belong? Or will they side with the bossing

class? Will they allow themselves to be scapegoats for the criminal class in suits and ties?

Perhaps this is the conflict of interest that has to be decided within every union. I don't believe workers, even police workers, want to see themselves as servants of the boss. All workers protect and serve. All workers deserve a union that aligns them with their class interest, which is, the people they choose to protect and serve. Do police workers choose to protect and serve the landlords of the world? Or would they rather choose to protect and serve their own neighbors, their friends, their fellows in the working class, their families?

Corporations strive to make workers identify with the company, to make company goals synonymous with workers' goals. Employees are forced to wear company gear (uniforms), sport company logos (uniforms), and order, arrange, and conform their lives around company time, company values, company crime.

If Amazon calls warehouses Fulfillment Centers, does that make Amazon workers virtual fluffers? Because naming a warehouse a Fulfillment Center is obscene. I know pornography when I see it. Workers don't exist to fulfill consumers' fantasies.

Bosses strive to convince workers that they are team members, associates, even family. If all those phony labels fail, the owners fall back on "independent contractor" as if workers were their own bosses and could determine their own hours and conditions and profits. Anything appellative but the plain moniker, worker, and never union member, because neoliberals want to separate workers from their class and coerce them into seeing other working people as the enemy.

We know who the enemy is. We know what the enemy looks like (Wibur Ross, Secretary of Commerce. The man who bankrupted Bethlehem Steel, the most iconic steel mill in America). We know that the enemy who attacks and pillages and plunders is a vulture capitalist, not a worker.

Since the seventies automakers have irrigated workers' brains with the team concept and hogtied job security with competition against fellow workers and loyalty to the golden calf of the supreme nation.

Long before MAGA the slogan of nation worship was Buy American. Not, Buy Union, but Buy American. Meanwhile, American companies exported more jobs than products, purchased foreign competitors at yard sale prices, and pumped American products full of foreign parts. Buy American is corporate sponsored propaganda; a lie promulgated by the crooked Administration Caucus.

Union officials ensconced in golf carts promoted Buy American as a job security battle against other workers, foreign and domestic, native and immigrant. Like police, American workers were trained to see the boss as a partner and other workers as the

enemy. UAW officials told us other workers were the enemy, even fellow UAW members. Never forget the union traitors who said workers are the enemy.

UAW officials exhorted us to save our jobs. Save our jobs by saving the company. Save the company by cutting jobs. Cut jobs by competing with other workers. Compete with other workers by speedup and safety risk and low wages. In other words, scab. Who were UAW officials working for? Who is the enemy of working people? Workers? Or the crooked UAW Administration Caucus? Police workers? Or Prosecutors, Mayors, City Councils, Police Chiefs, and Police Union office rats?

The job of convincing workers to identify with bosses and vilify fellow workers wasn't left to PR mavens. Union officials were bought off. In the UAW officials were bribed with featherbeds at Training Centers where every desk job required two workers: one for the company and one for the union. And nobody knew what anybody did because they didn't do shit.

Expense accounts for training activities looked like carnival promotions. They extorted suppliers of trinkets and polo shirts and hats. But we didn't know the half of it, and all the money they embezzled could have gone to wages and benefits. Yeah, that's why we got two tier. Yeah, that why workers took the shaft. Here's some of what we didn't know.

According to SEC documents, Joe Ashton who retired as President of the UAW in 2014 was recognized as a valuable asset to GM. From mid 2014 when he retired from the UAW through 2017 Ashton sat on GM's Board of Directors until he was busted for stealing from UAW members. His total compensation from GM including salary, stock, car allowance etc... per year was as follows:

2017	\$333,534
2016	\$301,340
2015	\$258,199
2014	\$87,011 (first year on board he only worked half the year)

Total = \$980,084.00

“During his career with the UAW, Mr. Ashton played a key role in organizing campaigns and contract negotiations with major manufacturing and technology companies in a variety of industries including vehicle components, defense, aerospace, steel, and marine products. Based on these experiences, he has developed a deep understanding of how labor strategy can affect a company's financial success, including expertise in areas such as manufacturing processes, pension and health care costs, government relations, employee engagement and training, and plant safety.” (GM Proxy Qualification 2016)

Oh yes, Brother Ashton has “a deep understanding of how labor strategy,” or the betrayal thereof, “can affect a company's financial success.” The bullshit only gets deeper.

GM filed a RICO suit against FCA alleging that “FCA cost it billions of dollars by corrupting the contract bargaining process with the UAW.” Imagine that. The pot calls the kettle black with less shame than a dog in a cat house.

“What a waste of time and resources now and for years to come in this mega litigation if these automotive leaders and their large teams of lawyers are required to focus significant time-consuming efforts to pursue this nuclear option lawsuit if it goes forward,” said Judge Paul Borman, a federal district court judge in Detroit.

These are the criminals in suits and ties. These are the neoliberals robbing America in the guise of lawful enterprise.

The notion that the UAW Administration Caucus can reform itself is ludicrous. The entire Administration Caucus is a confederacy of traitors. They all have to go. Furthermore, the Flower Funders’ assertion that no one else could step up to the responsibility with sufficient experience and expertise only compounds the treachery. We have UAW members active and retired in our ranks who are honest, credible, talented people.

A quick example. Robb Betts was the President of UAW Local 2151 in Coopersville, Mi. Delphi Management proposed to him that he should agree to put all appointees in the JOBS Bank. Employees in the JOBS bank were paid full wages and benefits but were not included in the company budget. Thus, all the appointees’ compensation would be allocated to a separate fund which would make the company books look better than they actually were.

I know this because Robb shared the proposal with me and said he was disturbed by the ethical implications. On the one hand, he wanted the company to look as good as possible in hopes that it would remain profitable and open. He felt a responsibility to do everything he could to help our plant survive. He felt he owed it to the membership. But he knew in his heart it was a lie, it was unethical. He said, he didn’t know what he was going to do.

I said, “Yes, Robb, you do know what you are going to do. If you were going to go along with the lie, you wouldn’t have told me, of all people. You are going to do the right thing.”

On another occasion management wanted him to sign off on a directive to demand that hourly workers sign a statement giving management permission to review their medical records. In other words, sign off on HIPPA laws. Robb flat out refused. He told me he wouldn’t even consider it. He said it was a violation of human dignity.

After the 2002 agreement the UAW International met with all the GM and Delphi UAW Presidents and Bargaining Chairs. They were given a presentation of the contract and they were expected to go back to their respective local unions and encourage members to ratify the contract. The contract contained a provision that stated the International and Delphi would meet within 14 months and agree to two tier for Delphi new hires. Despite

the fact that the UAW Constitution states that all agreements and supplements thereof must be ratified, ratification for the supplemental agreement would not be allowed.

Robb called me and asked me to meet with him. He was very distraught. He said, "I feel an obligation as president to support ratification but I do not believe in the contract." I said, "Robb, you don't have to do anything except delay the ratification." Robb delayed ratification for two weeks.

Robb had the talent and the credentials to be promoted to the International staff. He knew that defying the demand to rush ratification like every other GM-Delphi UAW President would cost him promotion. He stuck to his morals. Most Local Unions ratified within two days. The longer he delayed the more heat he got from the International. He never said anything, but I know from experience they must have threatened him.

After two weeks Local 2151 voted against the contract 2 to 1. Only one other local voted against the contract. Rochester, NY voted it down by one vote. The only reason we voted it down by such a large margin is because Robb Betts respected the membership enough to give us time to study, debate, and make up our own minds. Dignity. Moral clarity.

Robb and I butted heads many times. I was a pain in his ass at union meetings. I raised issues that made his job more difficult. If I was him I would have hated me. He never retaliated against me. We have UAW members like Robb Betts who are honest, ethical, dedicated, and capable.

We have to depend on ourselves, the rank and file, to wrest control from the crooked Administration Caucus. We have to recognize we have an adversarial relationship with the company and the Ad. Caucus. We are not partners in the business. We have our own interests: safety, fairness, democracy, wage parity, and an unmitigated identification with the working class. Integrity demands that we act on the principle of the original UAW members and take labor out of competition: equal pay for equal work because an injury to one is an injury to all. We will protect and serve our own. Solidarity isn't negotiable. That's moral clarity. That's the dignity of the working class.

Be Safe, Stay Solid, GreggShotwell.com

