

Live Bait & Ammo # 71

I dressed in corporate drag: a dark gray suit and tie, black wing tips spit shined, and a gold watch I bought on the street on my way to do business in the Temple. The watch didn't work but it sparkled, and appearance means more than substance when one is trying to pass inspection. I was about to hear Steve Miller give a speech to the Detroit Economic Club and for a soldier of solidarity it felt like an out of body experience. There wasn't a trace of grease under my fingernails. All the bills in my wallet were laundered.

I was surprised by the light security. I coulda-shoulda stuffed my pockets with paint balls. I walked in unimpeded and took my seat at table number 49. I introduced myself to the assembled guests: management types in "communications" at Metaldyne; a couple thick skulls from GM Powertrain; and an investor whose suit cost more than my car.

I ate lasagna, salad, bread, and tiramisu. I felt warm and sleepy. The voices around me were soft. The ambiance was distinctly devoid of emotion or nuance. This must be what rich people (or Ron Gettelfinger for that matter) feel like all the time—amnesiac. I forgot about my comrades outside with picket signs. The wind hammered their faces with hard rain but I didn't feel any pain, just a vague misgiving. I could see Miller. I estimated the distance as a peg from third base to first. I could have beamed him with a paint ball. Mentally I approached the dais, leaped over the table, and strangled him with my bare hands. I imagined murdering the remaining corporati with kitchen utensils while women screamed in the back ground and their men fainted.

Then we pledged allegiance and prayed to Mammon.

Miller began his discourse with a spate of jokes intended to appear off the cuff. His imitation of self deprecating humor and spontaneity reminded me of diagraming sentences with Sister Mary Gertrude. No one got it. He was playing for the crowd but the hard edge of skepticism in Detroit is serrated like an old bucksaw. His punch lines couldn't bridge the kerf.

How does the old saw go? Those who can manage a business do. Those who can't file bankruptcy. Gauging reactions of the crowd led me to believe the media hasn't tapped into Miller's noxious effect on investors, engineers, community leaders, and people who in one capacity or another are experienced in manufacturing. The victim of megalomania doesn't suffer, everyone around him does. The power of self delusion is inestimable. When Miller looks in the mirror he sees a full head of hair not a boiled potato.

The media portrays Miller as a straight shooter. Someone who tells it like it is and let's the proverbial chips fall where they may. I don't believe I was the only one in the room who heard the contradictions, false analogies, and damn lies. For example, he said the steel industry under his direction "endured a painful restructuring, but has been restored to health."

95,000 retired steel workers deprived of pensions and health care have not been "restored to health". In regard to the retired steelworkers Miller expressed disappointment. He said, "That dog won't hunt." [Making Steel, by Mark Reutter.]

Miller claimed he sleeps well at night because he knows he is doing the right thing. The self righteous declaration was, I believe, his only sincere comment. He spoke from the heart. He truly believes he is doing the right thing—for himself. Steve's World is a very small place. He does not see the damage left in his wake: the suicides, the broken families, the foreclosures. If it is good for Steve Miller

then, “It is right and should be so.” [from *The World According to Steve*, by Steve Miller]

In *Steve’s World* “all of Bethlehem steel mills are operating profitably with modern productive labor agreements. They are part of the Mittal group.”

In *Making Steel: Updates* [www.makingsteel.com] author Mark Reutter cites an Associated Press report from August 2005. “Steelmakers are warning their shareholders and the investment community that results in the third quarter of this year are going to reflect a much weaker landscape....Just 23 blast furnaces were operating in the US at one point this summer, the fewest since a nationwide steelworkers’ strike in 1959.”

Reutter cites, a Wall Street Journal report that “the emergence of London’s Mittal family as a significant force in in the U.S. steel market will diminish the bargaining power [of Ford and General Motors] and put further pressure on their efforts to control costs.”

Miller sold Bethlehem Steel to Wilbur Ross who made \$1.185 billion off the bankrupt company and passed it on to Mittal for further exploitation. Mittal is praised by the business press for breaking contracts, sacking workers, and driving wages down. Currently, Miller’s fellow vulture capitalist, Wilbur Ross, is buying up auto suppliers.

Pain and suffering don’t exist in Steve’s World.

Miller warned at the end of his speech: “I fear something like intergenerational warfare, as young people increasingly resent having their wages reduced and taxed away to support social programs for their grandparents’ income and health care concerns.” It was one point on which Steve and I may find agreement—two tier wages are socially degenerate.

Miller's fear of "intergenerational warfare" did not prevent him from asserting that he wanted to "restore our underfunded pension plan out of future profits" which by his design is based on cutting wages for new hires. Workers, I may add, who will not have a vested interest in a defined pension for their elders since they won't have one themselves. The "intergenerational warfare" Miller foresees is not so much a fear as it is a plan. Miller won't have to bust the union because the union will self-destruct if it adopts two tier as a solution.

Miller contends it is vital that Delphi sustain motivation for employees. Apparently, he doesn't get around much outside the tight circle of Steve's World. He hasn't seen the stunned and despondent faces of both hourly and salary workers. He admits there has been a "brain drain," an exodus of talent from the executive staff. He recognizes that Delphi needs to compensate people for their skills, knowledge, and experience. But he is unaware or minimizes the value of skills, knowledge, and experience on the shop floor. In Steve's World "human capital" is a quantity to extort and debase, not a quality to revere and nurture.

In conclusion Miller declared, "If we do this right, Delphi will remain one of the world's premier global automotive suppliers.... If we do it badly, Delphi may be broken up into small pieces, and America will have lost some of its precious industrial treasures."

Does he intend to "do it badly"? On March 31 Miller revealed his restructuring plan. Twenty-one of twenty-nine plants will be closed, sold, or consolidated. Is that not "broken up into small pieces"?

The auto industry could not absorb the closure of twenty-one Delphi plants in the next year. We should bear in mind that just because the straight shooter says something doesn't mean he means it. Originally, he said he did not intend to file

for bankruptcy. He set three deadlines which he backed down from. He set wages for Delphi workers at \$9.50, \$12.50, and most recently at \$16.50. Dealing with Miller isn't like buying a Saturn. Every time you visit the show room at Steve's World you get a different deal.

Contradictions, false analogies, and damn lies are Miller's stock and trade. The steel industry is healthy; pitting the young against the old will restore the underfunded pension; all skill, knowledge, and valuable experience is clustered in the office; and the sale or closure of 75% of Delphi's U.S. operations does not mean Delphi "will be broken up into small pieces."

Miller insisted that the press only writes about the people who are angry at him. We don't hear about the people who are excited about Steve's World and his vision for the future. We don't hear about the people who want to make sacrifices for Steve's World. No, we just read about "those people" across the street who think that the Delphi bankruptcy is a fraud.

Yes, he had to acknowledge the soldiers of solidarity. He said we have a right to speak out which is more generous than some of our local union leaders. He said his favorite picket sign was Miller Isn't Worth a Buck. "It must have been a typo," he quipped. It was a proud moment for me. I made that sign. My coworker, Juanita Cadman, has carried it in three protests in three cities. The concept came from another coworker who prefers to remain anonymous as do many in the dedicated ranks of the underground resistance. But he knows who he is and that his message got through to Miller and the Detroit Economic Club, too. Miller Isn't Worth a Buck.

To be continued..... (sos, shotwell)

www.soldiersofsolidarity.com www.futureoftheunion.com