

Live Bait & Ammo # 56

On October 27, the Bobbin Heads distributed a petition from our Regional Office. The attached letter requested that UAW members enjoin their friends and family to sign this petition requesting the bankruptcy judge to be nice to us and uphold our contract. The last sentence actually read, "We pray you use your power wisely."

Pray? Does the Regional Director want us to believe we are talking to God? What next? Will the International organize a caravan of buses to the court house in New York where UAW members will hold hands, and on the count of three , , , start crying?

The headline would read: "United Auto Whiners Speak Tears to Power"..... until Miller pulls up in his stretch Hummer and scolds them, "Dry your eyes, blow your noses, quit whining and sniveling, and get back to making car parts."

The petition doesn't have one legal leg to stand on. The judge will never read it. His secretary will file it under Useless And Worthless. UAW Region 1-D Director Don Oetman knows the petition is pointless. Oetman is trying to pretend he had a brainstorm and the Bobbin Heads are going along because it's so much fun to pretend.

I appreciate the rank and file members who in all sincerity have written and circulated petitions seeking public support for Delphi autoworkers. They are genuine. I recall asking fellow delegates at the Bargaining Convention in 1999 to rise in support of Delphi-UAW members and getting a standing ovation. I know the support is there. But for Oetman this is a sideshow, a diversion from the fact that he has failed as a leader. A real leader would have been on the shop floor when the shit hit the fan, not crouching in his bunker with a bag of donuts and a latte.

The rank and file meeting in Grand Rapids is attracting interest from UAW members all over the midwest and even New York. Many who plan to attend are not Delphi workers. They see Delphi as the lead domino and the GM health care concessions for retirees as the breach of a sacred trust. The broad response to what was intended to be a local meeting is an indication of a vacuum of leadership

at the top. Reporters aren't the only ones who get "No Comment." The silence out of Solidarity House is ominous.

GM-UAW retirees feel betrayed for good reason. They have campaigned for COLA on Pension since 1976 when International reps gave themselves COLA on pension. The International's response was always, "Don't worry. We will always take care of you." It is unethical to take contractual benefits from retirees. The UAW does not have the legal right to bargain for people who are not working, who don't pay dues, and who can't vote on the rotten deal.

Meanwhile, Delphi UAW members are feeling the heat from Commando Miller's flame-thrower. He verbally bitch slaps us every day in the press. Delphi workers don't know if they will be able to make the mortgage payment or retire with their shirts on, but they keep paying union dues and waiting patiently for the calvary. As my friend and fellow NDM member Dean Braid likes to say, "Is it time to put down the golf club and grab hold of the picket sign yet?"

Where have all the International Reps gone? Are they still singing Kumbaya with their corporate partners at the Center for Human Resources? Has anyone seen a Regional Director anywhere? Oh that's right, the Local Union leadership minus that rascal that resigned (Does anyone else find it odd that someone who tells the truth is accused of undermining the International?), was invited to the Regional Office to shake hands with the Governor of Michigan, Jennifer Granholm. Maybe she will fight for us? Is that what unionism is based on? Pretty blondes and wishful thinking? Golf lessons and V-CAP donations?

Wishful thinking is the notion that someone else will take care of your business and fight your battles for you. Hope is fighting like hell against all odds. I don't believe in wishful thinking, but like many other UAW members, I am full to bursting with hope.

Union bureaucrats have operated under the partnership/competitive model for so long, they don't have a clue how to respond. They've lost the ability to mobilize members and fight to win. Perhaps we should be more understanding, their partners just kicked them out of bed and they have sore tushes and wounded feelings to nurse.

Office rats don't have answers. We, the members, are the answer.

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by fighting to win. Members demoralized by years of company-unionism and team work slogans are looking at their hands and listening to their hearts. We can build, repair, produce, and deliver for Commandant Miller, or we can bring GM-Delphi to their knees by simply doing what we are told by the bosses -- nothing more and nothing less. We can turn up the volume and let the silence humming out of Solidarity House numb our brains, or we can listen to our hearts and trump company-union defeatism with the courage of a single conviction -- We are worth fighting for.

And Delphi deserves what it pays for: a half a day's work for a half a day's pay. Or was that a third?

The corporations sense the labor movement's weakness. They are determined to decimate and throttle the working class while we are down and in disarray. We must connect the Delphi plants so that our efforts are coordinated and strategic rather than random. We must also connect with other union members who may rise to our defense. Strikes are a valuable tool, but Delphi is eager to shut down a number of sites. Those plants at risk of closure must continue to operate and/or be occupied if idled by strikes in other locations. Miller ignited the ire, it is up to us to bank the fire and spread the resistance.

Furthermore we deserve to be treated like dues paying members. When we ask to see a legally binding copy of the GM-UAW Benefit Guarantee alluded to in the 1999 Delphi-UAW contract Highlights, the Bobbin Heads tell us we have to trust the International. If it exists, why can't we see it? Why shouldn't our brothers and sisters with 30 plus years of service be allowed to make decisions based on verifiable documents? "Words" as my friend and coworker Jimmy Jean says, "are like deer prints. They're exciting, but when you fry them up they don't amount to a forkful."

Reporters insist there is a Benefit Guarantee because the corpos told them so. They still don't get it. Their primary sources are frauds and the annual report is a deer trail. Sure, where there's hoof prints there's deer, and GM may be responsible for a bunch of children it can't afford which, like the old song says, "Is what you get for making whoopee." But the point is, the Benefit Guarantee is not laid out in the

UAW-GM-Delphi contracts. Custody will get worked out in court. The honeymoon is over, children, and step daddy is all stick and no carrot.

Our series of rank and file meetings, beginning November 6, in Grand Rapids, MI and the following week in Kokomo, IN have a straightforward agenda. It's an enlistment drive. We need what Brother Chavarria calls "Soldiers of Solidarity" [SOS]. Our object is to unleash our unruliness on the system of production and strike down The Finger's betrayal of our sacred trust with retirees. The Soldier of Solidarity Code pledges to protect retirees as they protected us and to protect new hires as we expect to be protected. Soldiers of Solidarity represent hope for a new direction in the future of the union because we're willing to fight like hell against all odds and never give up.

Join SOS now or consign yourselves to wishful thinking and company unionism forever.

In Constant Solidarity,

Sunday, Nov. 6, 2-5pm, UAW Local 1231, 4629 Alpine. N.W., Comstock Park, MI. 49321

All active and retired UAW members and IUE-CWA members are welcome. We appreciate all the input and support we can get. Old timers may guide us with the wisdom of their experience. Young workers may inspire us with energy and enthusiasm.

Protect retirees from cuts in Health Care. Their future is our future. Protect new hires. We are one union. Our Solidarity should not be divided into sectors and subdivided into tiers. Fight to win for the future of our union and working people everywhere.

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