

Live Bait & Ammo # 112: The Working Class is Too Big to Fail

GM offered the Canadian Auto Workers at the Oshawa Truck plant a buyout package: workers with 30 or more years get \$100,000 for production, \$120,000 for trades, plus a \$35,000 car voucher. Production workers with 26 years got more than a thirty year GM-UAW veteran in the States. The incentive options descended in accord with seniority but everyone was awarded a \$35,000 car voucher.

Why did Canadian Auto Workers get a better deal than UAW members in the States?

(1.) They were willing to fight for their rights by taking possession of GM Headquarters and blockading the building for 12 days.

(2.) Canadians have national health care.

UAW members have a wish and a promise for health insurance because in America a private consortium has medical care in a headlock. The notion that we are better served by profiteers is the result of infomercials sponsored by the profiteers. But all the charts and graphs and stats point to another salient fact: Americans Pay More for Less.

“Americans live shorter lives than citizens of almost every other developed nation, according to a report from several US charities. The report found that the US ranked 42nd in the world for life expectancy despite spending more on health care per person than any other country. If the US infant mortality rate were equal to first-ranked Sweden, more than 20,000 babies would survive beyond their first year of life.” [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7511426.stm>]

Our health care lags behind world class standards yet we pay more for health care than anyone else? Who gets the payoff? Who pays for the loss?

The assertion that GM's losses can be attributed to high health care costs relies on a pencil thin view of the GM conglomerate. GM is an insurance company. GM is a finance company. GM is a real estate company. GM buys whole car companies in foreign countries. GM isn't broke, GM is poised to take advantage of the next capitalist disaster. Since there aren't any significant legal checks and balances

against capital in the US, GM is free to move assets overseas and propagate the failure that will sanction a major restructuring, i.e., wage and benefit cuts, and then reach for a handout from the US Treasury. Which leads us to a logical question: can't the union make a stand?

The UAW Concession Caucus has always stood behind the corporations. In June 2001 Ron Gettelfinger organized a rally in Washington DC to support Ford Motor Company against allegations of building unsafe vehicles. 1,900 Ford Explorers circled the Capitol and 3,500 UAW members and their families rallied in Senate Park. "We stood up and were counted—for our families and our communities," Gettelfinger said in the UAW/Ford magazine, "Sharing Our Pride." [www.uawford.com/pdf/pride_sum01.pdf]

Gettelfinger has never organized a significant rally for workers in struggle. In fact he canceled the rally at Hart Plaza that was planned to support strikers at American Axle last April.

The Con Caucus has lobbied against every attempt at government regulations to increase CAFE standards, improve emission controls, and make vehicles safer. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Con Caucus has not done anything substantial to break the choke hold that private insurance rackets exert on working people. Indeed, they have become an insurance racket in their own right with a union controlled health care trust [VEBA].

The lockstep loyalty of UAW leadership to the corporate world order has earned the rank & file a long string of defeats at the bargaining table.

A single payer national health care plan like John Conyer's bill HR-676, [http://www.pnhp.org/publications/the_national_health_insurance_bill_hr_676.p hp] would strengthen bargaining power for direct wages. But the Con Caucus refuses to endorse HR-676 despite double lip service about social movement unionism and national health care. Can working people afford not to have national health care?

"If you and your spouse are 65 and retire today, plan on spending about \$225,000 on health care in your remaining years. That projection assumes you won't have insurance sponsored by a former employer and will rely on Medicare. Retiree

healthcare cost estimates have increased 41% since Fidelity Research Institute started calculating them in 2002. They don't include possible long-term-care expenses." [Consumer Reports Money Advisor 10/2008]

By nationalizing the total debt of the American banking system, Bush & Co have turned the United States into a Third World debtor nation, and guaranteed inflation and recession. The Bush bail out program renders us unable to afford anything but interest on the debt and war. Nationalizing bad loans advances the conservative agenda to cut to the bone any program that helps working people. We should do some nationalizing of our own.

If we win national health care, all workers in the US will be in a stronger bargaining position for direct wages. If we don't, we'll get delphied and axed in 2011.

I hope the Republicans get booted out of office. They deserve it. Hell, McCain wants to tax health care benefits and privatize social security. But the Democrats are not the answer to our prayers. If workers want to thrive and prosper, we will have to compel change with overwhelming force. Vote and go home doesn't get it. Obama has said as much himself. Change requires a social movement.

If workers in Canada, France, England, Germany, and Japan among others, aren't forced to bargain for health care as if the market were free, why should we? If other countries can afford to provide universal health care, why can't the United States? The working class is—like Freddie and Fannie and Bear—too big to fail.

We can't afford not to support universal health care. The equation isn't complicated. Stop the war. Bring our soldiers home. Invest in our crumbling infrastructure. Invest in the health of our citizens. Invest in the education of our workers. Invest in self sustaining energy production and a healthy environment. Invest in the one resource—workers—that creates a better standard of living for everyone rather than great wealth for war profiteers and oil cartels.

We can afford single payer universal health care. We can't afford one more year of war. We the people will never win anything by waging war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia and Iran. We won't bring anything home but dead bodies, maimed soldiers, and a debt to their families that we will never be able to repay.

Vote your conscience, then put your shoulder to the wheel like your family's health care depended on stopping the war machine.

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