

Live Bait & Ammo #41

--The Struggle Never Ends—

There is a war going on - a War against Workers - a war fought against workers on every front, in every country, every factory, every depot, dock, and mine. Call it Lean. Call it Modular. Or just old fashion Time Study Taylorism. It all boils down to one thing - control. It's not about money. They already have all the money. It's about control, domination, repression; and the measure of our freedom is the strength of our resistance.

Lean Production doesn't merely effect factory workers on the assembly line. Lean effects all workers in all work places. Lean effects health care workers. One of the most vocal and articulate groups at the UAW Convention in Vegas last June were health care workers from St Vincents Hospital. What did they have to talk about? Lean Production Standards in Health Care.

Hospitals are understaffed, overworked, and squeezed until the sweat runs dry. Patients' lives are threatened by lean standards of production. Nurses in Petoskey, Mi. are on strike; the longest strike ever conducted by nurses in the United States. Why? Lean. They are bargaining not simply for money but "respect and empowerment for nurses to help shape patient care and conditions in the workplace." They are protesting management's ruthless and reckless control of health care. Their battle ground like ours is the shop floor.

There is nothing more essentially American than rebellion against the forces that conspire to control us, deny us the freedom to determine the conditions of our labor, and shackle our choices to the corporate agenda. Lean Production is the weapon of choice in the War against Workers, and union members are the troops on the front lines. We have a duty to fight back, for ourselves, for our families, for our friends and fellow workers in all occupations.

Like many other solid unionists I talk back to the boss, and I talk back to the porkchoppers of the UAW, too. I have incurred the wrath of J.T. Battenberg, and I have incurred the wrath of Brother Yokich, God rest his soul. At UAW Conventions, I have had my microphone shut off. I consider it an honor. The UAW was built by troublemakers, not ass kissers. Fellow workers commend me for speaking up, for sayings things they believe, but are too cautious to say themselves. These same

people tell me they don't believe in Bush, or the war, but they are reluctant to express their opinions because they fear intimidation.

Intimidation is not an American value. The bully is not an American hero. Repression is not a respected condition in the land of the free and the home of the brave. There is nothing patriotic about silence. I have earned my right to protest.

I have been working all of my life. My daddy didn't send me to Yale. My daddy didn't buy me an oil well. I belong only to the fraternity and sorority of the working class. I belong to the troops who built this country, who risk their lives in their daily labor and on the battle fields. How dare some elitist corporate crook or appointed International Rep question your or my loyalty to the troops or the union. We are the troops. We are the union.

Bush & Co want us for the sake of our own security to sign off on the Bill of Rights. I don't need a damn anti union Homeland Security Department. Like Billy Robinson said, "I've got Homeland Security, it's called the Right to Bear Arms." Likewise, I claim my right as an American to speak my mind, to distribute Live Bait & Ammo, and to protest injustice, repression, and deceit in high places. If Bush & Co want to criminalize dissent, so be it, I'm an outlaw.

Lean Production, the War in Iraq, and the Patriot Act are all connected by the same themes: repression of dissent and the unequal distribution of labor, concessions, and sacrifices. Only workers and the children of workers die in war. The cheerleaders of the non working class make no sacrifices and take no risks. They only reap the rewards, the spoils of war, and the profits gleaned from concessions. The demand that we shut up and fall in line behind the flag waving frat boys in the White House is the same as the demand that we give up unionism and the right to determine the conditions of our labor.

The so called Patriot Act is anti American, it deprives us of the rights and liberties our forebears fought and died for. Lean Production is anti union, it deprives us of the rights our forebears fought and died for. When we give up the right to determine the conditions of our labor we become slaves. Silence in the face of injustice is not loyalty, it is not patriotism, it is the slave's expression of shame. What patriots love most about America is freedom. Bush and his corporate cohorts want to take it away.

The war in Iraq is a smokescreen for the War against Workers. While we were focused on the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in television air, Bush & Co cut 15 billion dollars from the Veterans Benefits Fund. We have a duty to support the troops. We have a duty to watch their backs while they are overseas. Real patriots protest. Real patriots reject the Bush plan to cut taxes for his cronies while simultaneously gutting social programs that benefit the troops. We should fight to ensure that every troop be welcomed home to a job with a Living Wage and a Union that will defend his and her rights, not for a day, not for a week, not for a month, but forever.

What's the difference between Lean Production, and cutting funds for social programs, which in effect reduces educators, firefighters, police officers, health care providers, and social workers while giving tax cut bonuses to the rich? The Bush plan for America is lean, mean, and diabolically confounding. There are 4,000 less police officers in NYC than there were two years ago. That's not Homeland Security, it's Lean Production applied to social programs that benefit working people.

I have yet to meet a lineworker who believed that Lean Production was intended to empower workers. I have yet to meet an American who truly believes that the war in Iraq was motivated by Bush's desire for freedom and democracy. The war in Iraq like Lean Production is a corporate hostile takeover. Soldiers, the production workers of war, risk their lives as part of their job description, yet Bush threatened to veto the Defense Authorization Bill if Congress did not eliminate full pension benefits for disabled veterans. The question is not whether we support the troops but whether Bush supports the troops in all ways, at all times, in all places.

Will Bush support the troops when they are back home working on the assembly line? Or will he support the export of more manufacturing jobs to China? 55,000 American soldiers died in Vietnam to stop the spread of Communism. Now Communist China is our most favored trading partner. Is that loyalty to the troops? The communists are building the Buicks that were once built in Flint. Two million manufacturing jobs have been jettisoned from America since Bush was appointed. Will our nation be safer when the exodus of good union jobs is complete?

Will Bush support the troops when they apply for a job in the Department of Homeland Security? Or will that returning veteran find that Bush thinks a union member can't be trusted to work in the Department of Homeland Security? And that if he or she wants the job, they will have to sacrifice freedom of assembly, association, and speech?

There's a difference between supporting the troops and supporting those who profit from the troops. Bush supports the parasites who live off Unearned Income. We know whose side we're on.

We need to ask ourselves: Will our children be better off than we are? Will our children have good union jobs? Affordable homes and health care? Or has the American Dream been betrayed?

The American Dream was not pie in the sky. It was anchored in solid values. You work hard, live honestly and modestly, you save your money, and you will retire with dignity. That is, until the corporate crooks cashed in a trillion dollars' worth of stock options just before the bubble burst. That is, until Bush & Co buried our children in a slag heap of debt, looted the Treasury, and sold out the industrial base of our nation. Where will our children find jobs outside the military after the corporate flag wavers have shipped all our jobs overseas?

Lean is not simply a method of controlling the shop floor and reorganizing work in order to eliminate jobs, multiply tasks, combine classifications and trades, and render seniority obsolete. Lean is a master plan to destroy working class solidarity and collective action by decimating union shops into smaller, more manageable groups. Piece by piece, bit by bit, work is stripped from the bargaining unit, outsourced and subcontracted to smaller, more manageable, non union outfits.

Some non union suppliers are so enamored of the process they are coming to the UAW Cooperation Caucus like johns to a pimp asking to be organized. If a company wants a piece of the action, they agree to be neutral in an organizing drive. In turn the Cooperation Caucus agrees not to interfere in the lean process of restructuring the workforce by disassembling the assembly plant into multiple components and sub-assemblies that can be readily outsourced to suppliers who pay lower wages. Cooperation with Lean Production is in effect a union organized wage cut.

While our jobs are going out the door, while our pensions are looted, while our union leaders capitulate, and social programs including Veterans Benefits are gutted, we must ask ourselves: What does it mean to support the troops?

The corporations are not the troops. The bosses are not the troops. The television generals are not the troops. President Bush is sure as hell not one of the troops. The troops are workers. The bastards in Congress who cut Veterans Benefits in the midst of war do not deserve our support, they deserve to be fragged. What have they ever done for us? What have they ever given us that we didn't have to fight for? That our brothers and sisters didn't die for in trenches or on picket lines?

What can we do to stop the attack on workers? What can we do to stop the outsourcing and sub contracting of our jobs? That's the turf we need to defend.

Warren Davis, elected Director of Region 2, proposed an outsourcing resolution which stipulated that subcontractors be required to meet "the economic conditions, including wages and benefits, provided in contracts between the UAW and the Big Three." It would have effectively snuffed the motivation to outsource our work to low wage non union suppliers. His resolution didn't jibe with the union/management partnership scheme.

The decision to dissolve Region 2 and deprive Warren Davis of his position as Director was not an honest effort to protect the integrity of the UAW any more than the war in Iraq is about freedom and democracy. It's about control. Davis was breaking ranks and the Cooperation Caucus had to exert control.

As a delegate to the convention I called for a point of order. I objected to the amendment to dissolve Region 2. Amendments should be submitted at least three weeks prior to the convention. I asserted that the amendment was untimely, improper, and should be rescinded.

The Public Review Board refused to hear Warren Davis's appeal. They excused themselves by saying it was a political issue. "Nothing in the Ethical Practices Codes prohibits such political maneuvers." Isn't that interesting? The PRB has ruled that ethics do not apply to politics in the UAW. The distinguished professors pulled a political maneuver of their own by supporting the Administration's abuse of power, and abdicating their responsibility. The PRB asserted that Davis needed to appeal

directly to the membership but they did not acknowledge evidence that Yokich refused to recognize Davis when he attempted to address the convention.

The PRB disclosed in case #1441: "When news of Davis' election reached the other members of the Administration Caucus, they called a meeting at which time a proposal was drafted to amend Article 10, §21, of the Constitution to eliminate Region 2 by merging its constituent local unions into Regions 2-B, 8 and 9. Davis was not present at the meeting of the Caucus."

Only the Constitution Committee has authority to originate amendments to the constitution during the convention. [Article 8, §16]. The PRB inadvertently presented documentation that the amendment did not originate in the Constitution Committee, it originated in the Administration Caucus, and was, therefore, unconstitutional, and should have been ruled null and void.

Who supports the troops fighting for freedom and democracy in the UAW? When I stood up at the convention and made my point of order - my protest against the amendment - I was ridiculed by Yokich, and the lapdogs on the convention floor laughed.

It's easy to give agreeable speeches and praise the administration. It's easy to praise power. But when you exercise your freedom of speech by challenging the administration, by speaking truth to power, that is the measure of your integrity. A true patriot protests injustice. True patriots don't turn their backs on the troops and support the Bush plan to gut veteran benefits, and attack social programs that support the troops in the fields, and the troops in the factories, docks, mines, hospitals, and unemployment lines. A true patriot supports the troops that make America work at all times, in all places, in all ways. Not just when it's easy, and safe.

What can we do to defend the dignity of union jobs and preserve our right to determine the conditions of our labor? Time tested union tradition tells us - Unite in solidarity against the bosses!

In an effort to emasculate the union and sever the bonds of solidarity that unite us, the corporations divide us into separate fiefdoms. Saturn has a separate contract. Nummi has a separate contract. Jeep has a separate contract. Delphi, Visteon, and American Axle were spun off, and separated from the herd.

Components and subassemblies have been outsourced in a wholesale effort to divide the union. The UAW Cooperation Caucus has in partnership with the companies colluded to divide and subdivide us into smaller bargaining units that are set up to compete with one another. Every Independent Parts Supplier has a separate contract. At the Convention, when I advocated for a National Pattern Contract for IPS, Yokich cut the mic. Walter Reuther said, "We must take labor out of competition." But in the "new" UAW competition is the name of the game. To save union jobs and control the conditions of our labor, we must follow Reuther's lead and take labor out of the competition by uniting all union members in an all out effort against the War on Workers.

Can you imagine a National Strike by all autoworkers? We would bring the economy to halt. We would bring Wall St. to its knees. Why don't we have a national strike? Who's stopping us? Bruce Allen, a Canadian Autoworker, said that union bureaucrats are the bosses' second to last line of defense against workers. The last line of defense is the police. When Brother Mark Farris, tried to give a speech at the Bargaining Convention advocating a National Strike, UAW Vice President, Gerald Bantom, cut the mic. The Cooperation Caucus doesn't want us to realize the power of a national strike. Besides, they skim 75% of the interest off our strike fund for living expenses. They are not about to dip into that kitty.

What is the advantage of isolation for a Local Union under attack by a multinational corporation? How effective will a strike at Jeep be if Daimler/Chrysler is working full production at all its other assembly plants? Who has the advantage when Locals compete with one another to offer management the leanest Living Agreement? Why does the Cooperation Caucus go along with management's divide and conquer scheme? Is it partnership, or is it collusion? If you support Bush's War on Workers, why belong to a union at all? Why don't you just give blood for a living?

In the next contract we will be offered monetary incentives. Don't be fooled. It's not about the money. It's about control. That's why they throw money at us. Here's a signing bonus, here's profit sharing, have a raise. Don't worry about the job cuts, it won't hurt you personally. It will all be done through attrition - an interesting word. Webster defines attrition as: "A rubbing away or wearing down by friction; a gradual lessening in number or strength due to constant stress; Repentance for sin motivated by fear of punishment rather than by love of God; A

gradual reduction in membership or personnel as through retirement." A Lean contract is not about the money. It's about control. It's about wearing us down. It's about a gradual lessening in number and strength due to constant stress and fear of punishment. It's about breaking the union and selling out the troops.

While we are transfixed with dollar signs and over time pay, the companies break up the bargaining unit and decimate solidarity, piece by piece, bit by bit, job by job. The strength of the union as a unified force committed to solidarity is of paramount importance to our security as a working class. Your pension is only as secure as the membership you leave behind. Management tells us they can't afford the "legacy costs" of pensions because they have more retirees than active employees. Why is that? Attrition. Lean Production.

Our security depends on how we answer the challenge of Lean Production, how well and how strong we rebel against the War on Workers. If management is allowed to destroy unions and determine the conditions of our labor in factories, schools, hospitals, and other workplaces; if management is allowed to continuously lower wages, cut benefits, under fund pensions, and force workers to slave harder and faster and longer, while rewarding themselves with bonuses, stock options, and gold plated stocking stuffers; our future and the future of our children is at risk.

If you want to support the troops then make the next contract a fight for union jobs and the right to control the conditions of our labor. If you want to support the union then defend the right to organize a union that isn't in partnership with the company. What does solidarity mean if not resistance against the forces who conspire to control the conditions of our labor?

The most authentic of American traditions is rebellion against authority. Rebel against the War on Workers. Confront injustice and deceit wherever you see it, from the shop floor to the top floor. Rebel against Lean Production. Rebel against company/union partnership. The strength of our freedom will be measured by our power to determine the conditions of our labor. Rebel because you are an American. Rebel because justice isn't silent and the struggle never ends.

In Solidarity,
UAW Local 2151