

Live Bait & Ammo #87: Struggle and Progress Go Hand in Hand

Stage whispers about the UAW managing a health care trust fund for GM sent shivers up the spines of the faithful and tears of rage to the eyes of the cynical.

The business of a union is organizing. As it is, UAW bureaucrats couldn't organize a table and four chairs if you gave them a blueprint and a hint: (the legs should touch the floor). Do we want the sons of hacks administering health care concessions to retirees for GM?

Office rats in union hats will not alter the fact that another layer of bureaucracy will only siphon off more dollars that could go directly to health care. The buy off would give UAW officials an incentive to support the inefficient status quo at any cost. Any cost to the rank and file that is. Their own jobs would depend on maintaining private health insurance rather than universal health care.

We have been offered two solutions: shift the cost of health care onto workers or have the unions shift the cost of health care onto workers.

Corporations claim they can't afford the high cost of health care. What makes them think workers' pockets are so much deeper than theirs?

The plot to shift the cost of health care onto workers and retirees is not a cure, it's a symptom of terminal denial. A cost shift (like the robbing of Peter to pay Paul) won't suffice when we all live in the same house.

Privatized health care is a moral hazard neither we nor the companies can afford. The growing inequality is a prescription for class warfare. Hence the corporations' desire to employ union officials to administer concessions.

While CEOs demand platinum health care plans for themselves and UAW International reps enjoy 100% reimbursement on all out of pocket medical expenses, workers and retirees are expected to shoulder the cost of medical inflation even as their wages decline and their pensions evaporate.

Why should those whose work entails the greatest health hazards receive unequal medical treatment? Why are CEOs and UAW officials such privileged human

beings? Let them have the country clubs. We want equal access to the hospital, the doctor, and the pharmacy.

Our major competitors in Europe and Japan opted for socialized health care after WW2, but the United States chose to privatize medicine and make insurance dependent on employment. This patronage system whereby employees received health benefits and pension promises in lieu of raises had a good will return on investment: loyalty. US employers experienced low turnover because of the social contract implicit in employer sponsored health and pension benefits. But things have changed. The social contract is on a gurney in a deserted hallway one flight above the morgue.

We won't revive the social contract by making concessions. There is no incentive to change as long as employers can shift the cost onto workers. The UAW has advocated for a national solution to the health care crisis for years, but lip service is a poor excuse for thunder and lightning.

Struggle and progress go hand in hand. Soldiers of Solidarity don't want health care just for ourselves, we want it for everyone. Cooperation with the corporate agenda to cut benefits and shift the costs onto workers will not save jobs or advance the cause of social justice, it will only delay the inevitable: a health care system that serves everyone equally.

SOS wants everyone to have the same health care benefits that CEOs and union officials enjoy. The Corporations will not join us in demanding universal health care as long as they can shift the cost onto workers and keep the perks for themselves and their junior partners.

Should workers volunteer to bankrupt themselves to save the company? Or should the companies and the unions together demand a solution that benefits all Americans by leveling the playing field with our European and Japanese competitors?

The UAW has bargained too narrowly for too long. We will succeed in organizing when the needs of all workers and the goals of the union are one and the same. We deserve a strategy of confrontation that connects the struggle of union

members with the struggle of all Americans. We deserve a strategy of concerted activity that ensures a victory for the union is a victory for everyone.

More concessions is not a comprehensive union solution, it's an unacceptable plea bargain.

(sos, gregg shotwell)

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