

Live Bait & Ammo # 83

In regard to concessions Gettelfinger keeps repeating the phrase, “We stepped up to the plate.” As if to say, we met our responsibility. But when wood doesn’t meet leather, the metaphor strikes out. Gettelfinger’s first responsibility is to the membership, not the company.

The Concession Caucus gives up jobs, benefits, wages, work rules, anything the corporos demand. But what do we gain in return? A promise of “new” work. That’s not collective bargaining, it’s racketeering.

Bob King, UAW VP and designated emcee in the never ending concession pageant, hyperventilates about “cooperation” as if we haven’t been hearing this crap for twenty-five years. Someone needs to tell breathless Bob the evidence is in: cooperation is killing us. The UAW lost 900,000 members under the cooperation banner.

“Continuous improvement” means speedup/cut jobs. “Work smart” means speedup/cut jobs. “Teamwork” means speedup/cut jobs. “Take the waste out” means speedup/cut jobs. All company/union slogans point to one end — gut the membership.

At Delphi the Con Caucus gave up everything including the power to strike and we won nothing in return. The Con Caucus turned their backs and ran away from 24,000 jobs without throwing a snowball. Now they’re running the same extortion game at Ford/Visteon. It’s not a collective bargaining agreement, it’s a shakedown. Want to know what to expect? Study history, it repeats itself.

The war on workers doesn’t end, it moves on. And it’s not a war you can retire from. There’s nowhere to hide and nowhere to run. The corporos want the pension fund.

The UAW hasn’t won a collective bargaining agreement with Delphi, but Miller has a temporary workforce in place. Not only do temps make half the wages, they don’t receive benefits, they don’t acquire seniority, and elections for replacement of retiring union officials have been waived in favor of appointments. Temporary

workers are essentially non union. The only difference is they have to pay union dues. How long before temps at Delphi decertify the UAW?

Con Caucus supporters argue the contract has not been broken, but the predominance of temps belies the contention. Delphi has replaced 80% of the workforce and by year's end there won't be a trace of the old guard left. Not enough to count anyway. Con Caucus supporters argue they won UAW members an early retirement from a bankrupt company with an underfunded pension. What the hell is that worth?

Gettelfinger said that the SAP [Special Attrition Program] helped to get Delphi "where they need to be." But what about where we need to be? Miller hasn't given the UAW anything. Gettelfinger blames it on "greed." Where has the Finger been for the last twenty-five years? Did he expect cooperation? He gave GM and Ford health care concessions and they responded with plant closings. The Con Caucus conceded hard won work rules at several Daimler-Chrysler Locals but the company stated bluntly the unorganized Mercedes plant in Alabama isn't interested in "neutrality". The message is clear: corporations are in no mood for cooperation, they are on the offensive.

What does the Con Caucus ever get in return for concessions? Buy offs. Plant closings. Downsizing.

In each Local where the Con Caucus whipsawed concessions on work rules the trade off was the promise of "new" work. The biggest concession is license for non union workers to enter the plant and perform jobs that formerly belonged to the bargaining unit. The Con Caucus has essentially traded the closed shop for an open shop on the promise of "new" work. There's nothing new about the corporate agenda. I can lay it out in three words. Break the union.

How many more cuts can we take?

The word decimate derives from the Latin word decimare which means to select by lot and kill every tenth soldier in the legion. Romans used the practice to quell rebellion. Competitive Operating Agreements adopt a similar style of decimation, less bloody per se, but more efficient as the unlucky ten percenters are replaced

with non union labor. The Con Caucus supports this policy of terror as a method of keeping the troops in order. But the program doesn't work on everyone.

Squeamish obeisance is for people who are afraid of hell. Organized resistance is for people who have already been there. Thousands of Delphi workers are transferring into GM plants and they are loaded for bear. GM dumped all our pension credits into Delphi and then bankrupted the company by forcing them to sell parts below cost. We have anger to spare.

The Delphi transfers at the new GM assembly plant in Lansing, Michigan aren't impressed with the non expiring living agreement that passes for a contract in the era of Continuous Concessions. They're expected to be team members first and union members second. Their seniority is worthless. They cannot exercise shift preference or transfer rights for sixteen months. They're treated like temps. All the best jobs and appointments were assigned to homies, many of whom have lower seniority. Team leaders, a peculiar species who go both ways, are selected by management to monitor fellow workers, give directions, and report back to management. A new NLRB ruling defines such operatives as supervisors. Transfers can't even run for union office for a year per Local By-Law. The divide and conquer tactics of the UAW Cooperation Team aren't restricted to relations between transfers and homies.

Transfers to Lansing from the Delphi plants in Saginaw were given relocation allowance, but transfers from Coopersville, Grand Rapids, and Flint were arbitrarily denied relocation allowance. Coopersville is further from Lansing than Saginaw. Why weren't they all eligible for relocation allowance? Because the Con Caucus wanted to help the company more than the dislocated workers.

Unequal treatment without reasonable cause constitutes discrimination and members are justifiably upset. In typical Con Caucus fashion, the Bargaining Chair, Steve Bramos, threw gasoline on the fire. He told them they're lucky to have a job — a good indication of the sort of representation they can expect.

I transferred to a GM SPO [Special Parts Operation] in Lansing. In orientation we Delphi transfers were informed of how cooperative union and management were in Lansing. The first day on the shopfloor our supervisor introduced herself by saying, "I'm a bitch. You don't have to like me, but you will respect me." Her lack of

self respect is her own business, but I have to wonder if this bald attempt at intimidation is what passes for union/management cooperation in Lansing.

Can the trend be halted in 2007?

The Concession train stopped dead in its tracks at Chrysler not because Gettelfinger didn't want to give Chrysler concessions on health care, but because he knew the rank & file wouldn't ratify it. Health care concessions were ratified by less than one percent at Ford and Gettelfinger knew it wouldn't pass at Chrysler. Daimler/Chrysler CEO, Dieter Zetsche, contends the UAW's resistance is "irrational" but workers in Germany have national health care. Why doesn't Zetsche state the obvious? Health care policy in the US is "irrational" and that coupled with a counterproductive trade policy is costing us jobs.

2007 contract negotiations at the Big Three are already underway. The corporos are mounting their campaign and SOS would be wise to do the same.

According to Bloomberg News, "Troy Clarke, head of GM's North America, said in an interview last week that he's already begun preliminary talks with the UAW on the new contract. GM's higher costs, he said, don't mean that labor strife is inevitable in 2007. 'We got where we are together and we'll get to the future together,' Clarke said. 'That's the spirit we enter into this with.'" [Japanese Earned \$2,400 More Per Car Than U.S. Rivals: Bloomberg News, 10-2-06]

The study cited in the Bloomberg article is to meant to convince us that concessions are inevitable, but Sam Gindin, a Canadian economist and union advocate, pointed out in an e-mail that the study indicates the Japanese advantage of \$2,400 includes \$1,400 in healthcare and \$1,054 per the exchange rate (45% of Toyota vehicles sold in the US are imports). In other words, a rational health care policy and a reasonable exchange rate would level the playing field. No amount of concessions by labor will ever resolve the health care crisis or the trade imbalance. The game is rigged.

Each concession we make helps to prop up and perpetuate the irrational system. Every time Gettelfinger backs away from another showdown we're that much deeper in the hole. Cooperation with management and competition with other workers is nonsense from a true union perspective.

Competition between workers will decimate, not solidify our ranks.

A Competitive Operating Agreement is a Trojan horse loaded with three lethal concessions:

- (1) the expanded utilization of temps which is in effect two tier;**
- (2) the importation of non union labor into the plants;**
- (3) the manipulation of union members as “team leaders” in supervisory roles.**

The Concession Caucus believes its primary goal is to help the companies be more competitive, but the strategy condemns us to a race to the bottom. We can't inspire workers to organize by siding with management and selling out union members.

It's not enough to boast, “We stepped up to the plate.” We have to get some wood on the ball and back up the chatter with Runs Batted In.

The rank & file derailed concessions at Chrysler and we can brake the Concession Train in 2007.

(sos, shotwell)

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