

Live Bait & Ammo #23

At American Axle in Three Rivers, Michigan, the Local agreed to a two tier wage in order to procure work from Mexico. Que pasa? Mexico gets new work and the US gets left overs? Local union reps hope that higher profit margins will mean they can negotiate higher wages for new hires in the future. Reminds me of a line by a poet who committed suicide: "Oh sublime moment of dishonest hope."

At Delphi Flint East it's the same deal. No wage cut, no new work. So they cleared some floor space and invited friends and relatives to work for less. What are brothers and sisters for? With the consent of the International UAW, Independent Part Suppliers lower the prevailing wage like a limbo pole, one local at a time. "Limbo lower now," sings Steverino and the Rollovers as they entertain the corpulent crowd with the Solidarity Striptease.

"The International Executive Board shall protect all Local Unions who have succeeded in establishing higher wages and favorable conditions and have superior agreements, so that no infringement by Local Unions with inferior agreements in workplaces doing similar work may be committed against the Local Union with advanced agreements."

[UAW Constitution Art. 19, Sec. 6]

Locals in Lordstown and Lansing have with the blessing of the International negotiated inferior agreements in whipsawing competition with other UAW plants. The darlings want to be first in the race to the bottom as if the prostrate pose will give them better standing in the "New UAW". Maybe.

At the Delphi in Coopersville, Michigan, workers are transferred from other plants to our facility while union members at our plant get laid off. Sound confusing? The National Placement Center, a joint project, is responsible for the mishmosh. Porkchoppers claim it is necessary because of the SEL agreement. Secure Employment Level was concocted in 1996 and never implemented in our plant despite the understanding memo until now, when we are in a layoff mode. Dozens more workers are sitting in Jobs Bank, an oxymoronic boondoggle, while other union members work overtime.

There are job openings at a GM stamping plant in our area, but working members who put in for transfers have priority over laid off members for job openings. That's a new one, hey? I'll bet the CAW is in a hurry to pick up on that little gem of manipulative rationality. Everybody is thumbing through Appendix L.S.M.F.T. hoping to strike it lucky and find a map through the morass.

Diviners tell us you have to go to Vegas, drink tequila for a week, devour a 75 page virtuality schematic served with steamed software and two pounds of battered footnotes before you can begin to crack the nut of Joint Wisdom contained in the Living Agreement. Notice, no one calls it a contract anymore.

The National Living Agreement wasn't written by anyone who ever worked for a living. It was written by attorneys with evasive personality disorders in a convoluted contortion of circumstantial locution with diabolically complicated references to memo-conundrums, unpublished letters, and appendixes riddled with inexplicable double jointness. In other words it has more loopholes than the Happy Hooker's fishnet stockings.

It wasn't meant to be understood. If it was, outsourcing would be a strikable issue; the national contract would not be ratified until all local contracts were ratified; job security would mean full employment by means of a shorter work week with no loss of income; Health & Safety would come equipped with teeth and balls; whipsawing would be taboo; and plant closings and sell outs would be met with massive strikes. It's not complicated. Every worker can understand solidarity.

When Daimler presented the Canadians with a plan to lay off some shifts and work overtime to meet demand. CAW Local Union President Ken Lewenza said union members would not build a single minivan on overtime. Daimler backed down and reduced the line speed instead of the workforce. Windsor saved 600 jobs. Meanwhile, Yokich is polishing his putz.

The UAW International owes us an explanation. The International owes it to us to visit each and every local in the country and answer our questions directly, member to member. Recently, Hoffa Jr. visited Teamster Local 406 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Has anyone seen Yokich outside the bunker? Do you expect he'll be making the rounds of your local trying to swing some votes for the Rollover Caucus?

J.T. Battenberg, the CEO of Delphi, visited our homey little plant in the sticks, but we have never seen Yokich or Shoemaker. Our Regional Director, George Andros, will meet with corporate honchos, but not the rank and file. Most members wouldn't recognize their regional rep if they saw him, and few even know his name other than "that fat bastard".

In the old days disputes were resolved at the point of origin, the shop floor. Speedups crashed against reinforced walls of resistance called solidarity slow downs. Workers didn't rely on the wily connivings of backroom negotiators. Union members didn't count on shyster legalese to weave a path of least resistance through the greased palms.

Labor didn't plead. Labor shut down, sat down, and occupied. Heavy handed foremen encountered sledge hammer retaliation. When management wouldn't cooperate, labor wouldn't work. Lines of demarcation stood solid as I-beams. The arrangement was clear and simple. Everyone understood the rules, the roles, and which side they were on.

Now every petty disagreement is bumped to upper echelons where the clean fingernails do their dirty work. Speedups, shut downs, layoffs, outsourcing, are not resisted, it's all arranged so as not to disturb the flow of profit. The UAW invests more money in golf courses and junkets than organizing.

We entrusted our destiny to appointed reps. Shame on us for betraying democracy. Shame on us for allowing ourselves to be lulled into passivity by the opiate of comfort and the promise of profit sharing.

The solution isn't more militant leaders, the solution is more militant members. The solution doesn't depend on slicker reps, the solution depends on more democracy. Real power is not enshrined in Solidarity House. Real power is in the grip of human hands on the levers of production, the wheels of transportation, the engines of automation.

We may not own the factory, but we control the means of production because we are the means of production. We may not control the investment of capital but we

trump the captains of investment with the jack of all trades. Nothing can be built or shipped without the investment of our time and energy and expertise.

The Shop Floor is our turf. The roads belong to Teamsters. Longshoremen control the ports. Airlines and railroads are unionized. This land is our land and if the king wants to call a recession, we can pull the goddamn walls down around him.

In Solidarity,

UAW Local 2151

Correction: In LB&A #21 I said that Scot McKenzie pres of Local 879 had kicked Nancy Schillinger out of the union on a petty technicality, refused to permit an appeal, and denied her right to free speech in the union meeting. Correction: his name isn't Scot. It's Spud.