

Live Bait & Ammo #42

One of my tasks as a machine operator is to gauge certain dimensions of the fuel injectors we assemble. One day I saw some measurements that were drastically out of specs. I notified my job setter who in turn notified an engineer. Then a supervisor with extensive experience as an auditor intervened. Before long two more engineers applied their collegiate wizardry. The B-shift administrator threw his weight onto the equation. Then another supervisor bellied up to the bar to add his expertise to the mix. We set the bench mark for participation.

We examined the parts and checked the gauge, again and again. The positive side of all this strutting and fretting is that for once we were a unified team with more concern for quality than production counts. Despite the dearth of common sense, that must signify something.

Then Brother Mahoney strolled by and we asked him to look at it. His mind was clear as a blackboard in July. He checked two parts on the gauge and said, "There's nothing wrong with these parts." The lights came on. The depth and breadth of my stupidity was astonishing. I felt like the pied piper of scrap. I had read the gauge wrong. A decimal place can mean the difference between a home run and a bunt. If you're not a baseball fan try it on your paycheck, you'll see what I mean.

The point is: I misled a whole group of experts. I told them what to see and they saw it. They knew better, they were experienced, but the power of suggestion channeled their perception like blinders. If Mahoney hadn't happened by we might still be spelunking in the murky caverns of Shotwell's mathematically challenged brain, waylaid by a decimal place.

It reminded me of Colin Powell at the UN holding up a vial of white powder. Fear. Then he displayed satellite photos of sinister laboratories. Horror. He invoked 9/11 and nuclear catastrophe. Terror. There could be only one conclusion: we must invade now before it is too late. We did, and Puff the Magic Weapons disappeared. Now Iraq is safe for US corporations.

When we stop exercising our critical and analytical intelligence we surrender our fate to charlatans. Before the elections we should have debated the recession and

White House ties to corporate scandals. Instead, all rhetoric was commandeered by war and questions of patriotism.

We succeeded in defeating a ragtag army that defended itself with pickup trucks and a miscellany of small arms. Now that the techno-spectacle of explosions has subsided, the media buzz is tax cuts tax cuts tax cuts. Shouldn't we question the plunge from trillion dollar surplus to trillion dollar deficit? Shouldn't we address unemployment, and the crisis in health care and education, rather than how to subsidize the rich in the vain hope they will trickle down on us?

Real homeland security means full employment, a living wage, Medicare for all ages, prescription drug benefits, the right to organize and bargain collectively without threats and intimidation, and a public school system that invests more money in our children than the Pentagon squanders supplying ruthless dictators with weapons of mass destruction.

The union vision is prosperity for all, but when we let company men frame the debate we restrict our perceptions and limit our options to prearranged concessions. Every time you go to a business update and listen to the litany of lies, you are bound to feel demoralized. They tell us we have to "cut costs to stay competitive". So we cut our own throats and call it a victory for free enterprise. Never mind that free discussion was monopolized and the prize was getting entered from behind by the pied piper of crap.

UAW members are getting sucker punched by the crooked bargain of a union organized wage cut in return for "neutrality agreements". What's neutral about unconditional surrender? What company would resist a union that pledged not to strike and promised to sell out the new hires? Neutrality my butt. Predators don't set agendas, they set traps.

Richard Dauch, CEO and chairman of American Axle, was the highest compensated CEO in Michigan last year. He collected \$27,594,666 in salary and stock options. Bloomberg News reported in January 2003: "As automotive supply contracts go, the agreement that American Axle & Manufacturing Holdings Inc. signed with General Motors in 1994 doesn't get much sweeter. Under the seven-year pact, which has been renewed, [emphasis added] General Motors is all but prohibited from buying axles, drive shafts and other critical components used in its sport

utilities, pickups and other light-truck models from any company but American Axle. Hence, the supplier has unusual leverage to maintain and even raise its prices."

Bloomberg News underscored the advantageous position of AAM with the following assessment: "General Motors today doesn't dare try flexing its muscles against American Axle because sport utilities and pickups are the No. 1 automaker's most profitable vehicles. Should axle or drive shaft deliveries experience any snags, General Motors's assembly lines would shut down. With General Motors over a barrel -- and contributing 82 percent of American Axle's sales -- the company has been able to post a profit every year since going public in 1999 and now has a market capitalization of \$1.24 billion. Dauch's 7.9 million shares, or 14 percent of the company, are worth about \$194 million. In terms of total return, American Axle shares have appreciated 41 percent in the past three years, while the S&P 500 lost 28 percent and the S&P's auto parts and equipment index lost 33 percent."

When the International approached Local 2093 in Three Rivers, Mi. about giving American Axle a third tier wage the Bargaining Committee told them they wanted nothing to do with it. So the International negotiated a concession package without them.

The "new" UAW stands for rollover not struggle. Instead of hope and justice, the porkchoppers offer fear and despair. The bitter flavor of swallowed pride is sweetened with enhanced retirements for top tier wage earners. Old timers who remember what it meant to belong to a union of fighters get offered a sack of silver to sell out new hires. It's a slap in the face.

UAW members at Three Rivers deserve better. They have consistently exceeded all expectations. They should be discussing a raise not a wage cut. Someone is misreading the gauge of a fair day's pay. They should be talking about a bigger share of the rewards. Instead the Rollover Caucus tells them a wage cut will make the plant profitable and ensure their future survival. The plant is already profitable. Concessions never saved a union. Give in today and all you guarantee is the bully will be back tomorrow.

American Axle in Three Rivers is providing contract information meetings on company time. Isn't that sweet? I suspect the International isn't acting too heavy handed about ratification because they want the members to feel responsible for what they get in the end -- a diminishing return on the investment of their lives and a legacy of defeat.

The wage concession degrades new hires, humiliates Local leaders, and shames all who believe in solidarity. Like the old union man said, "Better to die fighting than live on our knees."

stay solid,

UAW Local 2151