

Live Bait & Ammo #172: When the Leopard Lies down in the Grass

When I posted "[Defend the Right to Strike](#)" a flurry of Facebook comments and emails protested that this proposed Constitutional Amendment from the "[Protect Our Jobs](#)" coalition was necessary to avert passage of [Right to Work](#) laws in Michigan.

None of the objectors questioned why the proposed amendment contained a no strike clause for public sector workers. It's pitiful what we have come to expect from union officials. Instead of a no strike clause, why not insert a no lockout clause; a no striker replacement clause; a no unfair labor practice clause; a no firing of organizers clause; a no covering up the bullshit with lies clause.

While King & Co. were performing this constitutional curtsy to the bossing class, the "[Equality of Sacrifice](#)" gentlemen's agreement in UAW contracts—whereby management is asked to sacrifice as much as union members—was ruled unenforceable. Arbitrator, David Grissom, said in his ruling, "Frankly, this notion is near preposterous."

The ruling reminds us that without the right to strike, gentlemen, we're just talking words.

Entreaties to capitalist ethics are like appeals to an alligator's hygiene. One lives in an actual swamp, the other in a virtual bog of moral turpitude. One has a voracious appetite, the other a licentious attitude, which brings to mind the outrage over [GM's decision](#) to sell pension assets to China.

Workers are appalled. I think our gut reaction to anything involving Chinese investment in the US is that China is an Enemy of the State and thus, the People—*our* people.

China is not an Enemy of the State. Underneath the communist bunting China is a capitalist regime and a business partner with the United States.

I am not surprised that the government sells US Treasuries to China anymore than I am surprised that Congress passed laws enabling corporations to export our jobs to China. I am not surprised that GM sells pension assets to China because GM is partners with China, the US government owns GM stock, and the UAW bureaucracy brags that it is partners with GM.

We are fighting a three-headed monster: the Company, the Government, and the UAW bureaucracy.

The question isn't, why is GM selling pension assets to China; or why isn't Ford willing to treat workers like equals; or why doesn't the US government protect our jobs; or why don't union bureaucrats defend workers; but rather *how do we fight the three-headed monster?*

I am using a metaphor to elucidate our dilemma, but I don't believe I exaggerate the abuse of workers. In 2007 GM produced a [commercial](#) for the Superbowl in which a robot exhibited the feelings of a human being. I am not the only one who uses literary devices like personification to convey factual representations.

In the commercial the robot works on the assembly line. The robot drops a screw and the line stops. Everyone turns and stares at the nameless robot. She is shamed. She is walked out. She struggles to find new employment but fails at every menial venture. She is unfit and inadequate for life on the outside. She feels lonely and alienated. In despair she jumps off a bridge and commits suicide. Then she wakes up relieved to be back on the line and lucky to have—not just a job—but a place in life.

In this Superbowl ad GM humanized the robot and dehumanized workers.

The stated message of the video was: quality is built not only into the product, but also into the mind of the employee. The unstated or subliminal message was: workers are mechanized entities for which consumers should feel neither sympathy nor responsibility.

The stated message was: while autoworkers are incompetent to perform the most menial jobs, they are dedicated to the perfection of their minute task and content to have a trivial role in the corporation. The unstated message was: GM sucks the life blood out of workers and reduces them to mechanical functions.

The stated message was: excellent work ethics. The unstated message was: the price of quality is spiritual, emotional, and intellectual death for workers.

In this melodramatic video produced for the Superbowl, the corporation is a vampire and workers are zombies. I didn't make this up, GM did. The stated message was: workers are not safe outside the parameters of the corporate plantation. The unstated message was: neither the government nor the union will protect workers from corporate domination.

The question persists: how do we fight the three-headed monster?

I have been criticized for reducing every struggle to a Work to Rule adventure and soldiers of solidarity to a clandestine operation. The conventional rationale is that Work to Rule is limited in scope and difficult to sustain. The conventional belief is that we need institutions to guide and protect workers and that we can't have functional organizations without membership rolls, a dues collection mechanism, official representation, and [jake-leg](#) Democrats.

Except for the jake-legs, I agree with my critics. It makes sense to me. The trouble is, they ignore the stench emanating from the back end of the elephant better known as government sanctioned company union partnership.

If the government protected workers rather than corporations, and if the unions weren't in bed with the company, old fashion strikes and democratic worker organizations would be the order of the day. But our institutions have betrayed us and workers must be cautious about how they exert power until the movement crests.

The reduction of inventory and the organization of rank and file workers into engaged activists is the nuts and bolts of Work to Rule—a rudimentary precursor to any strike.

We are living through an era similar to the nineteen-thirties in which autoworkers met in basements with blacked out windows to organize resistance against corporate control. Workers won't feel safe from retaliation, and they won't be liberated from intimidation until they discover how to cripple the three-headed monster by exerting control of production.

Power respects power, not elections.

Work to Rule is not simply sabotage. It is an invocation for workers to reject dehumanization and to rule collectively in pursuit of just rewards and humane conditions.

Soldiers of solidarity is like the leopard who lies down in the grass. She's not sleeping. She's hunting.

sos, GreggShotwell@aol.com

www.autoworkersunderthegun.blogspot.com

www.factoryrat.com