

LIVE BAIT & AMMO #91: From Workers' Pockets to Money Changers' Wallets

The UAW International is making the rounds at Delphi Locals — eighteen months late and a dumbfounded butt full of excuses to boot — but sometimes you go to war with the generals you have rather than the generals you choose.

Gettelfinger & Co. had hoped to avoid a confrontation by negotiating health care concessions and buy offs on top of a prepackaged bankruptcy settlement (a two tier wage at Delphi that was never ratified but doesn't expire until 2011) sealed with a kiss in April 2004.

GM smelled fear not conviction.

GM could have ended the dispute long ago. In fact, they could have kept Delphi out of bankruptcy just as Ford did with Visteon, but GM wants more than a degraded workforce. GM wants to extract a pound of flesh for every ounce of investment. It's not enough to break pattern bargaining. GM wants to humiliate the union.

The sweetheart deal bought time not victory. Time for GM to stockpile and resource with other suppliers. Time for Delphi to replace and retrain a new workforce. Time for Gettelfinger to practice his posture.

Sometimes it seems interminable, but the 2007 National Contract is a deadline not even Judge Drain can postpone. We're bearing down hard on the crossroad where GM, Ford, and Chrysler expect us to sell our collective soul for a song. A song we've heard before. Dig in.

“It’s time,” as Jerry Tucker said, “to make that line in the sand a trench.” [Former UAW Official Jerry Tucker On The Crisis Facing U.S. Autoworkers - 05/03/07- www.laborradio.org/rawaudio]

On April 30, 2007 David Barkholz reported in the Automotive News “Delphi posted a U.S. operating loss of \$11 million in March 2007, compared with a U.S. operating loss of \$93 million in the year-ago March.....Delphi ranked No. 1 on the Automotive News list of top 150 original equipment suppliers to North America with original equipment sales of \$16.89 billion in 2006.”

Delphi is doing its best not to show a profit in the U.S. In March Judge Drain approved \$37 million in bonuses to Delphi executives. Minus the bonuses, Delphi made \$26 million dollars in the United States in March.

Enough is enough.

The buy-offs weakened the strike threat but active Delphi workers aren’t the only ones with skin in the game. Workers who transferred or retired have an underfunded Delphi pension and GM hasn’t come to the table with a fistful of anything but sweat and threats. The vultures are still trying to cut losses and cover asses with sweet talk and promises. If this planned bankruptcy succeeds, the Chapter 11 strategy will spread like disease. Legal thugs will break VEBA’s like promises made in the back seat.

The Con Caucus complains that bankruptcy laws put the union behind the eight ball. That’s all the more reason to fight the battle at the point of production rather than the court of corruption: the court where fraud and incompetence are rewarded and honest labor is punished. When law is used as an instrument of repression, insurrection is in order. That’s why we have a Second Amendment.

What happens at Delphi is the future of the union. We can't afford to give more ground. We can't afford to look the other way and pretend we are safe in our jobs or retirements. Prepackaged bankruptcies that dump pensions and health care, break contracts and reduce wages without interrupting production are racing downhill like runaway Freightliners. As long as the union is afraid to strike the trend will accelerate. Flint, Michigan and Anderson, Indiana are stark examples of what GM has in mind for America. How can any worker in good conscience cooperate with GM's scorched earth policy?

GM set up Delphi to fail so they could break pattern bargaining. If the union permits GM to split us up and sell us off piece meal, and then exploit the situation by staging competitions between Locals to see who can work for less, we may as well post the UAW's obituary in the press. We all know in our hearts what's needed is a strike that would shut down the industry. We all know in our minds that the Concession Caucus doesn't have the balls. But new hires at Delphi are hungry and old hires at GM are sick and tired of backing down.

Art Reyes, Local 651 President at Delphi Flint East, reported at the Bargaining Convention that attendance at union meetings is at an all time high. They know what is at stake. Brandon Foster, a Delphi new hire and elected committeeman, wrote in the October 2006 issue of Local 167 News:

"Management seems to operate under the assumption that the contract has been thrown out. Therefore, they can do as they please. I assure you, this is not the case. One of the issues that we currently face is the retirees brought back into the plant as contract employees. We have no issue with the retirees coming back into the plant to help and train our new members. You have an invaluable wealth of knowledge and information for our new employees. We do however take issue when a contract employee starts running production or turning wrenches. We have a contract. When you turn wrenches and run production you undermine that contract. The contract that has served you well for many years. The contract that has a direct correlation to your pension. Do you really want to weaken that

contract? Retirees please do not get the wrong message. We respect all you have done for us. You have paved the way for us to have what we have today. I am asking you to support us when it comes to performing bargaining unit work inside the plant.”

Many of the new hires at the Delphi plant in Grand Rapids formerly worked at the Bosch fuel injector plant. A few years after ratifying a two tier wage agreement, Bosch closed the plant and moved to South Carolina. They don't need any history lessons. They already know what concessions will get you.

New hires at Delphi deserve our respect and support. In the event of a strike there is a danger that some contract workers, most of whom are former UAW members, will cross the line. That's where our retirees come in. Retirees can't be fired. Judges can order injunctions against union members but retirees aren't in the union. Retirees should stand at the gates, identify any former brother or sister who attempts to cross, and escort them home.

Scabs threaten to steal our pensions as well as the legacy we leave to the next generation. Bear in mind, effective persuasion takes time. Skilled persuaders are patient, methodical, and persistent. Take the long way home when you give a scab the door to door service.

Union members at GM plants also have a part to play in the event of a strike at Delphi. As GM workers we must do our share by refusing to handle scab parts or replacement parts from other suppliers. We should examine all Delphi parts carefully and return the whole shipment when we find defects. And finally, in the event of a work stoppage at Delphi, we must strike any GM plant left standing.

We are coming down to the wire. GM and Delphi are building inventory and union members should respond in kind — Work to Rule. Veterans, including contract

workers, should inform new hires at Delphi that if they leave machines running during lunch and breaks they are cutting their own throats. When they work through lunch and breaks they violate the union contract and undermine their bargaining position by giving the boss something for nothing.

If you give up something and receive something in return, you're negotiating. If you give up something and receive an "attaboy" in return, you're a sucker and no one respects you.

It's dangerous to leave a machine running unattended. If you run scrap, you can bet the boss won't take the blame. You will be fired. I once told a supervisor who liked to pretend he was Mr. Friendly, "You're a good soldier. When your superiors tell you to fire me, you will fire me. You may not like it, but you will follow orders. Friendship won't mean shit. So cut the crap." He didn't argue. Supervisors have no loyalty to workers.

We won't win what we don't fight for.

Short surgical strikes at strategic locations like Grand Rapids and Lockport, where Delphi produces parts for Toyota as well as GM, are in order. Shut them both down: Toyota and GM.

Short rolling strikes lower the risk of green recruits crossing the line. If the UAW wants to demonstrate how serious they are, we should double the strike pay for new hires at Delphi. And let everyone know if we strike we aren't coming back to work for less. If GM-Delphi forces a strike we must fight to win—win more than we earned before we struck. We don't go out the door just to keep what we have. If we strike, we strike for more. This battle is not simply about Delphi, it's about the "restructuring" of the auto industry, that is, a massive transfer of wealth from workers' pockets to money changers' wallets.

The No Concession Petition is like a strike vote. It sends management a solid message. All UAW members, including State workers, and most especially Delphi workers, should sign and circulate the No Concession Petition in their workplaces.

The course we take will write our history. Shall 2007 be the year the UAW turned back the assault on workers? Or will 2007 be the year the union turned its back on the next generation and ran? If we don't defend the next generation, who will defend us? If we don't defend ourselves, who are we?

Dig in. "It's time to make that line in the sand a trench."

SOS, Gregg Shotwell

No Concession Petition available at www.soldiersofsolidarity.com