

Live Bait & Ammo #100: Highball the Strike

At the press conference to announce the UAW strike against GM, Gettelfinger stood before the microphone like a deer in the headlights and said he didn't want to strike. He felt "pushed off a cliff." He said, "No one wins a strike."

Should rank & file members have to remind the president of the UAW that everything we ever gained—from union recognition to Cost-of-Living-Adjustment and Thirty-and-Out—was won in a strike?

Gettelfinger reiterated concession after concession after concession that he has negotiated on behalf of GM. Then, he expressed surprise that the sum total didn't add up to a positive, and that GM wasn't more cooperative. How is it he never learned that when you roll over, again and again, management takes you for a punk not a partner?

How should we regard a union leader who waves the white flag in the first hour of a strike?

Gettelfinger turned to Cal Rapson, UAW Vice-President in charge of the GM department and asked him if he wanted to say anything. Rapson sat on his hands and shook his head "no". I have never seen a more abominable lack of leadership. Rapson put 73,000 workers out on the street and he had nothing to say to them? Rapson should be taken off the job, denied Workers Comp, and placed on extended disability for loss of backbone.

Gettelfinger suggested that he had been "naive" about GM's intentions. The loss of innocence is tragic in children not old men. Everyone in work boots knows GM intends to take back everything they can.

Gettelfinger admitted that he had approached GM about a union controlled health care plan—"VEBA"—two years ago. He never consulted UAW members and retirees about his VEBA idea. He consulted with Lazard Ltd. and came up with a plan to help the folks on Wall Street who live off unearned income, and union office rats who need a desk to put their feet on.

Local Union leaders shouldn't have to field all the phone calls from distraught retirees. The retirees who won strikes back in the day deserve to have an information meeting where Rapson and Gettelfinger explain how an underfunded health care plan is going to protect them. They deserve answers to their questions straight from the horse's mouth. Anybody who wants to screw around in the backroom and deliver Rosemary's baby should be prepared to attend the baptism by fire, not pass the buck off to local officials.

Reporters, analysts, and rank & file UAW members have openly speculated that the strike is a ploy. If it's short and sweet, we should be suspicious. We gave up \$2,000 a year minimum for the last VEBA. We stand to lose more in four years of a concession contract than we would in a sixty day strike.

Ask yourself some questions while you picket. Does a VEBA make you eager to retire or determined to work as long as you can? Can you trust a scheme that's long on promises and short on cash? Can you keep your head above water without COLA? Is it a good idea to sell out new hires? Can we retreat to victory?

The corporations want to take away everything we ever earned. The union president responds by calling a strike, and then saying, "No one wins a strike".

That's a set up.

If we want to win, we have to highball the strike and demand no end until VEBA is off the table, full cost of living is restored, retirees get the health care they earned from the company, temps win equal status as union members, and we retain the right to strike over outsourcing and subcontracting.

Don't back down. Send bargainers a message. Bring hand made signs to the picket.

[VEBA Short Changes Retirees]

[Concessions Don't Save Jobs]

[Equal Rights for New Hires]

[COA is DOA]

[Don't Rock the VEBA, Sink It]

[No COLA No Contract]

[Fight to Win]

And if they come back with a tentative agreement in a matter of days, be prepared to send them back to the table. Nothing like a boot to the backside to straighten a spine.

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