

Live Bait & Ammo #150: The Chicken Dance

The GM-Nexteer plant in Saginaw has been working around the clock seven days a week. Where can you go from there? The Detroit News reports that GM will keep nine of its eleven assembly plants running full bore through the traditional summer shutdown and most of its stamping and powertrain plants in high gear. But since workers voted down a concession contract in Saginaw, management announced a massive layoff.

Makes sense if you have a brain the size of a chicken. Management is ticked about the trouncing they took at the polls Thursday when rank & file workers crushed the company's hopes for more concessions. So the bosses started cranking out the Chicken Dance tune to see how many chickens they can get to shimmy. Trouble is, there are more roosters than chickens in Saginaw and the boss is about to get the eyes pecked out of his greasy head.

By Monday morning the numbers will be down and sliding head over tails into the ditch of what Work to Rule really means.

You can't retaliate against workers and expect them not to retaliate in turn.

The Wall St. Journal reported on June 13 that Chinese workers at a Honda plant have returned to work after a strike demanding higher wages, but "Once inside, they started a go-slow action to press their demands for an increase in basic pay to 1,600 yuan a month from 900 yuan."

They want nearly double their compensation. Who do they think they are?

The Wall Street Journal went on to report, "Koji Matsuyama, a senior general affairs manager of Honda Lock Manufacturing Co., said a majority of striking workers returned to their positions Monday, but 'many of them are still sitting inside the plant, refusing to work.'"

The WSJ reported, "Labor experts monitoring disputes in China said that one of the demands of workers at the key-systems factory is to elect their own leaders in their government-sanctioned union....'Workers at the Honda parts plant are openly stating that the official trade union in their factory is useless.'"

While Chinese workers are sitting down to demand higher wages and democratically controlled unions, workers in Saginaw, Michigan are exercising the only direct democracy they have—contract ratification—and the company is retaliating against them.

The new UAW Region 1-D Director, Gerald Kariem, will have to choose sides: the company's race to the bottom "competitive" agenda or rank & file workers.

GM will have to learn the lessons of the past all over again. You can run from unions but sooner or later workers will work to rule, and if they have to sit down to shut down production, or simply tell the big boss man, "I don't know what to do. This darn machine just doesn't want to work," the result will be the same. Roosters don't strut to the Chicken Dance tune.

Stand by your coworkers. No one should be caught by the boss alone. If you see a boss talking to a coworker, get within earshot and keep book. Write down what you hear. Back your coworker up because management wants the chickens to dance and they will be willing to spite their own faces by walking out workers they need to meet production quotas.

Time is on our side. GM can't withstand a drop in production now that they are revving up and preparing for an Intial Public Offering [IPO] of stock.

GM needs the parts and rank & file workers need R_E_S_P_E_C_T.

Kariem can step up or step down. Either way, workers will be watching his dance steps and keeping book.

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