

Live Bait & Ammo # 76

Cooperation, Concession, and Competition will save jobs and enhance the quality of our work life when Elvis returns. Until then, SOS is convinced that taking control of the shop floor is “a practical solution to an urgent need.”

Power respects power not punks. If you want a piece of the pie, you better be prepared for a piece of the action. And bring your own knife.

It's a good bet that before “The King” returns Judge Drain will revoke the Delphi contract and the fulcrum of power will shift from the lawyers and the porkchoppers to the rank and file. Get ready. In lieu of a contract the rules of the street apply.

Office rats in union hats can talk book to the walls until the ceiling falls, but we've got gears to strip, wires to clip, and balls to break. Goodbye contract. Hello chaos.

The Concession Caucus will likely respond to the Judge's ruling by running a sham strike and then offering us a contract with the ruse, “We know it's a piss poor deal but it's better than the Drain.” Send them back to the bargaining table with an ultimatum for GM:

- 1.) A non expiring Benefit Guarantee
- 2.) Preferential transfer rights including corporate seniority. We didn't choose to transfer out of GM. Why should we be treated like illegal aliens?
- 3.) Parity between GM and Delphi including equal pay for equal work. Two tier is not a union solution, it's a prepaid funeral arrangement.

Vulture capitalist Wilbur Ross said, “The biggest question is this wild card of Delphi Corp. and then the union contract renegotiation next year. Those are two big landmines. Delphi's not going to totally shut down. But if a court does impose a draconian structure on the workers, you will at least see wildcat strikes. I just can't imagine if Steve Miller gets anything like what he's proposed, there will be peace and quiet.”

Q : Why?

A : “I just think there's too much anger that's been built up and frankly even if the international union were to agree — and I don't think there's any great chance that it would — it can't control the individual workers well enough to get the settlement ratified.” [“Investor Sees Gold in Suppliers” The Detroit News 4-19-06]

The rank and file is ready to rumble but the Concession Caucus is leading the charge with a white flag. “We have made a conscious choice to put aside the adversarial approach,” UAW VP Bob King told an automotive conference in Detroit.

“King noted that the UAW has struck several agreements with major parts suppliers that relax union work rules and job classifications in factories to improve productivity.” King made this public statement the day after Ross suggested it. [“The UAW takes a Cooperative Stance” Detroit News 4-20-06]

No wonder Brother Bob fails to organize new members unless an employer enlists him to help reduce labor costs. No wonder some of Gettelfinger’s “most enthusiastic supporters are the top executives of the U.S. auto industry.” [“Union Leader Presides Over Painful Changes” Washington Post 5-15-06] The price of “neutrality” is always more than one bargained for.

In an effort to undermine the resistance and protect GM the Concession Caucus frightens and entices Delphi workers to cut and run. As Bob King indicated remaining members will be coerced into conceding every hard won work rule that makes factory life humane and gives individual workers a crumb of autonomy.

The CC is signaling to their corporate partners they are ready to rollover not only at Delphi but across the board. The Concession Caucus has already helped GM and Ford set a legal precedent to retract retirees’ accrued vested benefits. No amount of concessions will save jobs or satisfy management’s craving for ever cheaper labor. Workers who compete with workers are playing Russian roulette for the bosses’ amusement.

Productivity has propagated faster than tail on a rabbit farm, yet owners want to pound more plow horses into shares. Like they say on a narrow street in Manhattan, “One man’s loss is another man’s dividend.” As long as we stick to the competitive agenda, we’ll never win. The system demands a loser and we’ve been tagged like pigs for the slaughter.

Former Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern advised unionists that the quest for “more” is no longer “a very effective strategy”. [“The End of More” L.A. Times 5-22-06] At last the Democrats have revealed the other side of NAFTA — the end of progress for the working class.

When Samuel Gompers was asked, “What does labor want?” He replied, “We want more schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more constant work and less crime; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge.”

McGovern, the old saw horse of the Democratic party, preaches that we should endeavor to cooperate with the ruling class in their quest for more jails and less schools; more weapons and less tools; more vice and less learning; more crime and less work; more greed and less time for family; more revenge and to hell with justice and equality.

Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich said a PR firm engaged by GM offered to pay him for “praising GM’s buy out plan”. [“Did GM Offer Pay for Kudos?” Detroit News 4-21-06] Unlike McGovern, Reich refused the “integrity buyout” but it appears there were plenty of other takers. UAW leaders are pushing Delphi members to jump ship first, and ask questions later. We want answers now.

Justin Hyde reporting on bankruptcy proceedings for the Detroit Free Press [5-25-06] wrote: “John Sheehan, Delphi's chief restructuring and accounting officer, said if Delphi gets the changes it wants in its contracts, the company would save \$9.2 billion by 2010, but would still need to find another \$4.6 billion in cash. Of that amount, \$3.1 billion is pension obligations, which Sheehan said the company was committed to honoring.”

This statement to the court is worth repeating in paraphrase. If Delphi gets everything it wants the pension will still come up \$3.1 billion short.

So how long after Delphi gets everything it wants will the company be back in court? Or more precisely, how long after the Benefit Guarantee expires will the pimp break his promise? How long before Delphi retirees are cut adrift with a sardonic “Beg your pardon, didn’t you read the fine print?”

Ron Gettelfinger who promised to “hold the line on health care” and not permit employers to “shift the cost of health care onto workers,” [UAW Bargaining Convention June 2002] said he would not reopen the GM contract. [“UAW Won’t Reopen GM Contract” Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, Oakland Press, etc..... 4-15-05]

Gettelfinger said, “...if you concede a benefit, you figure it’s gone. It would be hard to get it back. I’ve said before, I’ve been in negotiations for a number of times over the years, I don’t ever remember a company calling us up and saying, “Hey, you know what? We’re doing so well since those negotiations, we feel like we shorted you guys and want to give you a little more.” (Laughs) I know once it’s negotiated away, it’s gone.” [Interview Detroit Free Press 7-12-05]

Not only is it gone, Ron, but they’ll be back for “more”.

The Concession Caucus has made unprecedented concessions on health care and plant closings in the middle of a contract. The Concession Caucus response to GM-Delphi’s attack on workers is buy-offs and a series of classes on “How to Live on Less”; “How to Start your Own Business”; “How to Retire when You Aren’t Ready”; “How to Find a New Career”, and meetings with Financial Advisors, the same people who didn’t foresee the stock market dive in ’99 and who sold employees’ Delphi shares for five nickels and three pennies. The Concession Caucus behaves like an arm of GM’s Center for Human Resources, not a union.

The CC has no plan to fight back because they are partners in the business and they view workers as a pain in the ass. A case in point: union officials and rank & file members at the Delphi plant in Dayton, Ohio have been suspended and fired for doing their jobs. The president got walked out of the plant in handcuffs for “trespassing”. The International UAW doesn’t respond to the intimidation and harassment because they don’t want to ruffle the goose’s feathers. The status quo has its costs but those with status never pay.

NAFTA, a liberal agenda in conservative drag, succeeded in driving Mexican workers across the border, but where can we go?

The solution to our dilemma doesn’t come from Karl Marx or Adam Smith, it comes from the playground. There are worse things in life than getting your ass kicked. There’s putting your head down and walking away. If you let the bully take your lunch today, he will be back for “more” every day. We know the playground belongs to McGovern and his neo-liberal cronies but we don’t have any where to go. We live here and the only border we can cross to prosperity is the one from individual choice to collective action. The only way to beat the bully is to gang up on him. GM-Delphi’s plan for success depends on our demise. Crash the celebration. When Drain pulls the plug, clamp the pipeline and throw down. We have nothing to lose but the boss’s smile.

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