

Live Bait & Ammo # 93: Temporary Status / Permanent Impact

The most important issue in upcoming UAW negotiations with GM, Ford, and Cerberus is temporary members. How we treat the temporaries will be the measure of our union. If temporary members don't get dignity and justice, we can't expect dignity and justice in retirement.

New hires, not retirees, are the future of the union. Two tier is not a collective bargaining agreement, it's a prepaid funeral arrangement. If you are retired, or preparing for retirement in the near future, it would be wise to defend the temporaries. Make them permanent and equal members. Someday, they'll be watching your back.

Since Gettelfinger cracked open the door to takeaways from retirees, no one is safe from the slash and burn of concession bargaining. The only bulwark against the attack on workers is a militant rank and file — a rank and file that is willing to lay down tools with or without the approval of the Administration; a rank and file that feels a legacy of solidarity down to the soles of their boots.

Recent history does not bode well. At Delphi, Visteon, American Axle, Lear, and Guide the Concession Caucus sacrificed new hires for phantom "job security". At GM, Ford, and Chrysler the Con Caucus sanctioned the expanded utilization of temporary workers effectively saving the corpo.....

Let's do a little math.

The Big Three estimate labor costs at \$70-75 per hour. But temps don't get any benefits and make less than \$20 per hour. So let's say, for the sake of easy math, that temps represent a \$50 per hour savings. \$50 times 40 hours equals \$2,000 times 50 weeks equals \$100,000 per year per temp.

The companies refuse to admit how many temps are employed, but Ford and GM retired over 50,000 workers and less than half were replaced by transfers from Delphi and Visteon. A nice round low ball estimate of 5,000 temps equals \$500 million dollars a year. You'd think management would treat them a little nicer than they do. No dice. They kick them to the curb and treat them like dirt while the big bad UAW holds the boss's coat and..... Wait!

This just in on UAWire: *"Full-time workers are being replaced with temporary workers who are paid half what regular team members earn and cannot afford health insurance. Temporary workers are real people, not cushions or buffers to be used and discarded whenever it suits you. They work just as hard as your full-time workers and deserve real jobs with good wages, benefits and security for their families."* [<http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/Toyota>]

Sorry. Never mind. That message is designed by the UAW for Toyota, not UAW represented companies. I mean, UAW represented workers.

Negotiations with the Big Three are scheduled to begin July 23, but we all know the truth: negotiations began when Gettelfinger opened the contracts at GM and Ford two years ago.

While we wait for the shot across the bow the corporos and their flunkies are drilling holes in the hull. With undo diligence the Concession Caucus dismantles solidarity by whipsawing local unions into thousands of job cuts through outsourcing, subcontracting, and the expanded utilization of temps.

The scheme is referred to as a Competitive Operating Agreement rather than a Collective Bargaining Agreement for good reason. It is not a collective bargaining solution designed for the common good of the working class, it is the epitome of dog eat dog-ism. By the time negotiations for the national contract begin our solidarity will be shredded. The Big Three will have reduced labor costs by 30% through cut throat attrition at the local level. The purported excuse is that they have to be competitive with Toyota but Toyota has already signaled that they will not be left behind in the race to the bottom.

The sad fact of the matter is: capitalism has no bottom other than that imposed by collective action. Without a struggle all that workers can expect is a downward spiral.

Job cuts, outsourcing, subcontracting, and the expanded utilization of temps will allow the UAW to present the membership with an agreement that retains the wage and benefit level to which we are accustomed, and all we have to sell is our souls..... a little more COLA diversion..... some minor cost control in health care..... and the new hires, the future of the union.

The auto companies may call them temporary, but their impact on the UAW will be permanent. If we don't demand justice and equality for temporary members, we don't deserve to call ourselves union.

sos, Gregg Shotwell

