

Live Bait & Ammo #159: A Goldfish with Glasses

He must think workers are stupid. How else can anyone explain it?

He says, if UAW members lower the automakers' fixed costs by cutting wages and benefits and trimming work rules to the bone—as in less break time and a jack-of-all-trades paradigm—it will help the union organize.

It's crazy. It's straight from the anti-union "Right to Work" playbook which insists that lower wages will create more jobs and more justice for workers. Only it's coming straight from the mouth of UAW International President Bob King.

In the November-December issue of *Solidarity*, the UAW house organ, Bob King explains how lowering labor costs will benefit the UAW by helping unionized companies compete against nonunion companies, thereby creating more jobs in the unionized sector of the industry.

King reveals as much forethought as a gold fish.

What's to prevent nonunion companies from lowering their labor costs further? Where does the race to the bottom end?

The UAW Concession Caucus has promoted the idea that concessions save jobs for thirty years. Evidence of the policy's failure is irrefutable: the UAW has lost two-thirds of its members. Cooperation with the corporate agenda is killing the union. But King threatens to take the doomed strategy to a grave new level.

King doesn't want to organize workers, he wants to organize employers by proving to them that the UAW can help lower labor costs and control workers.

Some members say Bob King has a hole where his brain used to be. It's not true. He just sounds that way because he thinks workers are stupid enough to believe that cutting their own wrists is a good way to give blood. The man is desperate to prove to the bosses that he can do a better job than his father, a former industrial relations director at Ford. He isn't stupid, he's dangerous.

King's cognitive dissonance—up is down and back is forward—is so pronounced it permeates all UAW negotiations.

The GM stamping plant in Indianapolis is scheduled to close but the plant has not been granted closed plant status, because GM wants to retain experienced workers in Indianapolis and King is helping them attain their objective.

The Lake Orion GM plant has been granted closed plant status despite the fact it was awarded two new contracts to build cars for Chevy and Buick. In a reversal of precedent, workers with the highest seniority at Lake Orion have been denied the option to transfer and workers with low seniority have been forced to transfer, because GM wants to replace low seniority workers with second tier workers and pressure high seniority workers to retire.

Again, implementation of closed plant policy is perverted to help the company.

The Ford plant in St. Paul has been staffed with low paid "temp" workers for five years because the plant is going to close—some day. It all works in the company's favor.

King calls this charade, "The strategy to win justice UAW members deserve."

If you put your head between your knees, retreat does indeed look like charge. But how do you persuade workers to assume the posture necessary to see an advantage in cutting wages?

Cognitive dissonance results when beliefs conflict with behavior. Dissonance can be harmonized by devising new beliefs that suit the desired behavior. In the case of King, the new belief is that competition between workers will lead to a traditional union value, solidarity. Since personal sacrifice is noble in pursuit of a higher goal, King frames the self-defeating behavior—cutting one’s own wages—as a struggle for justice and the ultimate goal of uniting all workers in solidarity.

Curiously, King does not ask UAW members to raise the wages of second tier members by cutting their own wages a notch, thereby equalizing the sacrifice. Instead, he frames the competition for lower wages as a moral crusade on the road to justice for all workers, except second tier UAW members. Thus, he creates a moral justification for workers to agree to wage cuts that is ideological, improbable, and abstract, rather than reinforcing shopfloor solidarity with a shared sacrifice which is personal, empirical, practical, and actually possible to achieve.

Why the disconnect between justice for all workers and justice for second tier workers (and temp workers) within his own legitimate jurisdiction—the UAW?

Because companies don’t want to raise the wages of lower tier workers. Their goal is to turn two tiers into multiple tiers, a literal stairway to hell.

Therefore, King strives to help the automakers cull top tier workers through wage abatement and forced retirement without activating the genuine person to person solidarity, which equality of sacrifice would engender among union members working side by side.

In order to persuade workers that cutting their own wages is a worthwhile behavior, it’s imperative that King portray himself as a progressive union leader motivated by a selfless moral code. Hence, he compares himself with Walter Reuther, marches with the famous civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, and holds a candle to protest the US military’s mistreatment of South Americans.

His publicity bio even includes a stint in the seminary at which point his father apparently convinced him that a feather bed at Ford, where papa was head of labor relations, would be a better position from which to strive for social justice.

King attests that he worked as an apprentice while he went to law school. Anyone who has served as an apprentice, which requires both on the job training and after work classes, knows that an apprentice doesn’t have time or energy for law school. Hence, the common allegation that the apprenticeship was a feather bed. Indeed he never worked as an electrician. He went straight into his career as a union politician and collected the highest wage scale in the union as a journeyman electrician for his “service” to the membership.

Check out the big grin on King’s picture in *Solidarity* magazine. Does he look like he hasn’t had a raise in five years? Does he look like a worker who has to choose between eating or going to the rest room because his break time is too short to do both?

No, he looks like a guy who just pulled a fast one. Or a goldfish with glasses.

sos, GreggShotwell@aol.com

www.warriorsoflabor.com

www.soldiersofsolidarity.com

www.factoryrat.com