

Live Bait & Ammo #160: Waiting for Flying Saucers ?

UAW President Bob King and his corporate partners at GM, Ford, and Chrysler-Fiat will blame the competition they've rigged on workers and relentlessly degrade them into believing they are worth less and less as profits rise. That's not a guess, it's the drill.

History lessons must be revised before the profiteers of war and labor are able to con workers with the same old lies. We have to be literally vigilant. The most common words in the con man's lingo are "free" and "lucky". As in, you are lucky to have a job but you are free to quit if you don't like it. Unless, of course, you're enlisted. In which case, you defend freedom while the lucky sit home and collect dividends. The only reason we have enough volunteers in Afghanistan today is because there isn't enough opportunity in the land of the free. It's an old story.

When the Confederacy failed to acquire enough volunteers, they instituted conscription with exemptions for important people. Slave owners decided slave owners were too important to fight in the war to defend slavery. The Confederacy granted one exemption for every twenty slaves owned. Thus, a plantation master with one hundred slaves could have an exemption for himself, his three sons, and a nephew. It was, as workers said back then, "A rich man's war and a poor man's fight." Men who refused conscription were hung. Their property was confiscated and friends and neighbors were warned not to help the draft dodgers' women and children.

Today, working people in the south commonly sport the rebel flag. They've been conned into believing that the Civil War was about some principle other than the privileges of slave owners. Through a revision of history, they've come to believe that defending slavery was a war for freedom. In fact, the only thing free was labor. Slavery, which provided free labor for the rich, depressed wages for all workers regardless of color. White southern workers not only got screwed, they fought for the honor of getting screwed, and some of them are still defending that honor.

Sometimes the truth is too painful to admit. When facts defy our cherished beliefs, something has to give. We can reject the beliefs we were taught, or we can reject the facts and alter evidence to sustain beliefs that bolster a more glorious version of events.

On December 21, 1954 Marian Keech and a small cult of followers gathered on a hill expecting that the world was going to end and that they, the true believers, would be rescued by flying saucers. When the world didn't end and flying saucers didn't appear, Marian and her followers claimed that their faith had saved the world from destruction. Faith can dominate experience because beliefs are not bound by hard facts or natural law. The supremacy of belief over reality is self-perpetuating.

We have our own true believers in the UAW. They still believe Bob King and his enforcers have our best interests at heart when they claim that concessions save jobs and workers have to be more competitive. UAW members who believe this Concession Caucus boilerplate are like the workers who fought to defend slavery while the slave owners drank sweet tea on the verandah and cheered them on. One has to wonder where they've been for the past thirty years.

How many more times will American workers be conned into "A rich man's war and a poor man's fight?"

A goldfish lacks foresight because a goldfish doesn't have any memory. Every time he swims around the bowl, the view is brand new. The struggle against oppression is a struggle against denial and the tendency to forget painful memories. America invaded Iraq because America forgot the Gulf of Tonkin.

We learn to forget in order to ease emotional discord and make peace with ourselves. But if we truly want to strive for the American Dream, we must face facts squarely. We must never forget how consistently we have been lied to, cheated, and betrayed. A case in point is the auto industry.

According to a study by Sean McAlinden at the Center for Automotive Research: “Salaried workers at the Detroit Three earned an average of \$122,963 in 2008 compared to \$81,506 for their foreign automaker competitors.” [UAW Boss was Key to Big 3 Survival, Rick Haglund Grand Rapids Press: 6-10-10]

On top of that discrepancy, American firms employ three times as many bureaucrats as Germany and Japan. [*Fat and Mean*, David Gordon: pages 44–47]

“As the late economist David Gordon argued, American corporations are less competitive and less productive than their European and Japanese counterparts due to the burden of an oversized corporate bureaucracy. That bureaucracy reflects a corporate strategy of treating workers as costs to be controlled, not essential contributors to corporate success.

Josh Bivens, an economist at the progressive Economic Policy Institute, argues in a new study that unions and blue-collar wages are not hurting U.S. manufacturing, but high corporate salaries are.”[Give CEO Pay the Pink Slip, Moberg, In These Times: 3-23-09]

We know where to trim the fat. The Detroit Three failed because of mismanagement, fraud, and overpaid managers. UAW members have already made more than their fair share of sacrifices. The union should fight for the working class, not the bossing class.

According to Bloomberg News, GM’s pledge to build vehicles in the US is limited to less than 2.26 million units through 2014, or until the government has recovered its investment which should be much sooner.

In 2007 GM sold 4.5 million vehicles in North America [General Motors Corporation 2007 annual report, page 32]. In other words, GM is committed to build less than half the number of vehicles it once sold in America. Once GM is free of its obligations to the government, GM will accelerate its downsizing in the U.S. and Canada, expand overseas, and vigorously pursue its primary goal of becoming a major importer to a de-industrialized United States. Concessions don’t save jobs. Concessions pay moving expenses.

Bob King’s goal of helping GM succeed is contingent on GM reducing membership in the UAW and the CAW. The UAW isn’t a union so much as it is a shareholder.

It’s hard to accept that an institution which your family has believed in for so many years has betrayed you. We can acknowledge the evidence, or we can revise history, wave tea bags, blame immigrants, and throw our support behind politicians who pledge to cut off unemployment benefits and extend tax breaks for slackers at the top of the pyramid.

We can face facts squarely. Or, we can keep the faith and sit on a hill like true believers waiting for flying saucers.

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