

SPECIAL: MAY 8, 2008: Euan Gibb's response to Buzz Hargrove

May 8, 2008

Re: Oakville Rejection a First in CAW History

As one of the co-authors of the leaflet that my National President, Buzz Hargrove claims was filled with 'mistruths and distortions', I feel compelled to respond.

Rather than misleading our co-workers with leaflets we were in fact expressing widely shared, collective and legitimate frustrations. This issue is really about presenting a different perspective from our national leadership and the corporate community.

It's a question of our strategy as a union. Specifically, it doesn't make any sense to us that we should be freezing wages, suspending an increasingly important cost-of-living allowance (oil and food prices anyone?), increasing drug co-pays, and giving up much-needed time off work in order to 'help' or protect a struggling auto industry.

We don't get to decide where cars are produced or for that matter, what kind of cars are produced. These are the most crucial questions and we don't have a say. Many of us wish we did have some control over these choices in our industry (recyclable green cars anyone?)

Retirees in our industry have fought for as long as we've been making cars in North America to establish decent wages and benefits. When confronted with the question of whether giving things up would help protect our jobs, we came up with a clear NO which was reflected in the historic ratification vote on Sunday. There are no real advances for our brothers and sisters in Windsor or St. Thomas in this deal.

Local 707 president Gary Beck's claim that the workers in our plant didn't understand the industry's overall problems are downright insulting. Not only do many of us spend a majority of our waking hours studying and discussing conditions in our industry but we all sat through an hour-long presentation from CAW economist Jim Stanford last Sunday. Jim could not have been clearer about the 'storm clouds' converging above the auto industry and the broader economy. We get it. What we clearly don't agree with the National Union's strategic response. To eliminate our differences by claiming they are 'mistruths and distortions' is patronizing. We had a three hour meeting last Sunday where any "mistruths and distortions" could have been challenged and corrected. None of them were.

Euan Gibb euan[at]union.org.za

CAW, Local 707