

SPECIAL: MAY 7, 2008: Lindsay Hinshelwood's response to Gary Beck

May 7, 2008: Op-ed from 707 sister

The workers at the Ford plant in Oakville made history at this recent ratification vote because they are tired of being lied to by Buzz Hargrove and Gary Beck, the local's president, as well as by the company. It came as a shock to workers a tentative agreement had been reached when the recently elected bargaining committee was not scheduled to meet until June to negotiate a new contract by the deadline of September 16 and were therefore not included in this bargaining.

When the workers learned of the concessions they were expected to make and the jobs that would be lost they were angry, and even more angry that they were being forced to ratify a bad contract five months early. They were also being deprived of a strike mandate vote and therefore were stripped of their right to strike.

The general membership sent a clear message to their elected representatives for their leadership to reject this offer and send them back to the bargaining table, this message was made loud and clear before Sunday's ratification vote. The leadership of Local 707 did not listen to its members. Therefore on the day of ratification the membership arrived at the meeting angry and with a rejection vote for this offer. No one spoke positively because the offer is an obvious bad deal. And Gary Beck's comment that leaflets with mistruths and distortions is an outrageous lie and one he tried to put over at the meeting with no success. Leaflets were distributed by highly educated members with valid points that the membership were already contemplating. They were distributed by people standing up for the rights of the membership and people who are a threat to Gary Beck. Not one elected representative made an effort to provide any information to the workers.

The CAW failed in Oakville because the workers know a bad deal when they are offered one. And they are very aware of issues in the industry. It should have failed everywhere else but fear got the better of the other plants. This deal is extremely bad for St. Thomas who approved the offer by 97%. Their plant will close and their issues should have been retraining, re-education and reintegration into the workforce and preferential hiring in Oakville. The Master Bargaining Committee of the CAW failed to answer any valid questioned

that was asked of them, but did give it their best effort to sell the membership its snake oil.

The members of the 707 in Oakville, like all autoworkers, are tired of being threatened and bullied by the company that their jobs will go south if they don't comply. They work in harsh adversarial conditions and had earned their wages and benefits. They've made concessions in the two previous agreements and should not have been emotionally manipulated in this contract. They made the right decision to reject the contract. Concessions are never solutions.

The membership asked this bargaining committee whether or not it even had a legal right to force this ratification vote, and whether it had a legal right to deprive the workers of their right to strike. This question was not answered so the legality of this contract is still in question.

What is very clear, is that Local 707 was prepared to go on strike to settle its issues and they now have 3 and 1/2 years to save up for their own personal strike funds.

The Ford/CAW membership has just set the precedent for wage slavery in Ontario. Let's hope GM and Chrysler do not follow suit.

Lindsay Hinshelwood, BA
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NOTE: This letter was written by a sister at local 707. It was submitted to the Star in response to Van Alphen's article where our local pres. was quoted as saying that Oakville workers don't understand the industry's problems.
