

Update: Chrysler Skilled Trades Appeal

Wednesday, March 26, 2012

Four Pages long.

On Monday, March 26, did you know where your skilled trades representatives were?

They attended a meeting at the WCM Academy (formerly Technology Training Center) to discuss implementing the “rationalization” This rationalization was one of the main reasons skilled trades rejected the contract last fall and why hundreds signed an appeal of the International Executive Board’s decision to declare the contract ratified. By holding this meeting our elected representatives are acting as if our vote and our appeal mean nothing. When you see them, ask them about this meeting they attended.

As you know, the UAW-Chrysler 2011-2015 contract was rejected by a majority of skilled trades members. Nevertheless, the International Executive Board declared the entire contract ratified after holding a single conference call with local presidents, shop chairs and skilled trades representatives. We appealed that decision to the IEB. Hundreds of UAW members, most of them Chrysler Tradespeople, signed the appeal.

On December 9, 2011 a group of us met with Chuck Browning, Administrative Assistant to President Bob King and Mike Nicholson, General Counsel to the International UAW. In addition to reviewing the minutes of the abovementioned IEB meeting we requested additional information that would help us prepare the final arguments in our appeal—we believed any challenge to a decision of our union’s highest leadership body should be as well informed as possible. What we asked for included the following:

1. The actual vote tallies—most members have only seen the percentages for and against—of how many members, broken down by production and skilled, actually voted yes or no on the contract
2. A copy of the administrative letter that spelled out the procedure for local election committees to conduct separate ratification votes for skilled trades

3. A hard copy of the IEB meeting verbatim minutes that included the comments from Brother Nicholson that were “redacted” in the minutes we were shown
4. The minutes of the conference call that led to the ratification decision
5. A written explanation as to why the contract still had not been signed.

In December these requests were restated in an email to Brother Browning, who told us we would be getting a reply shortly after the holiday break.

In January, having decided in the interest of expediting the appeal process to complete our arguments without the requested documentation, we submitted an amendment to our original Statement of Reasons that had been delivered to the IEB last November.

Our amendment’s main point was that, in concurrence with our initial Statement, that if the IEB had based the ratification decision on its assertion that the skilled trades rejection was not primarily over skilled trades issues, the burden of proof was on the IEB. The IEB had still, after sharing the partially censored minutes, presented no proof whatsoever of the alleged motive for the skilled trades rejection. Therefore, we concluded, the IEB’s decision was illegitimate.

This is March and we have received no response from the IEB, either to our Appeal or our request for information. Not only have they not provided any of the information we requested—information that any member in good standing should have access to—we have not even received a letter denying our request. We requested, at the meeting in December, a hearing on our Appeal before the IEB but have not received a reply to that request.

We find it preposterous that a body that took well under an hour to ratify the contract—including the Skilled Trades Rationalization that eliminates over two dozen trades—can take months to decide the merits of an Appeal of that same rushed decision and cannot even decide whether or not to allow members access to basic information.

We are not coming from a place of animosity. We are supporters of the labor movement and will be the first to take action if anti-union legislators try to impose “Right to Work for Less” legislation on Michigan workers.

We filed this Appeal in the spirit union solidarity. We felt we could not be silent when we were being forced to swallow a contract that threatened our jobs, our safety, our professional integrity and our futures. We thought the IEB action was contrary to the principles of union democracy. When the rank and file’s voice is taken away and top-down decision-making becomes the norm, the result is apathy, demoralization and paralysis.

There are many corporations and anti-union politicians who will capitalize on member dissatisfaction to push their own agenda—undermining collective bargaining. What they want to restore is what was known, before the sit-down victories in the 1930s, as “the tyranny of the open shop.”

Now more than ever we need to rebuild our union to become again the unified fighting force that won the eight hour day, COLA, SUB pay, pensions, health benefits, the weekend off, vacations, holidays, redress of grievances, rights for trades and dignity on the job.

IN THAT SPIRIT, AS LEADING APPELLANTS, WE ARE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP:

1. If you have not signed the appeal yet, there is still time. Any member can sign, including production, retirees and members outside of Chrysler.
2. Sign a petition to the IEB asking them to respond to the Appeal, give the lead Appellants the information they requested, and schedule a hearing on this pressing issue.
3. Email Cbrowning@uaw.net or call him at Solidarity House in Detroit at 313 926-5000. Ask for the President’s office, then ask for Chuck Browning.
4. Call your local’s International servicing rep and tell him/her you want to know the actual vote tallies.
5. If you are a skilled trades member who voted “no,” prepare a written statement explaining why no voted the way you did. We will need these personal statements if

we are granted a hearing. If we receive a decision and are not granted a hearing, we will need statements for our appeal to the Public Review Board.

To sign the appeal or the petition or to make your statement available, see George Windau at Jeep in Toledo, 2nd shift KJ paint shop, or email autoworkercaravan@gmail.com

A Win for Windau (Our Lead Appellant)

Ever since George Windau campaigned for a “no” vote on the Chrysler contract, and then filed the appeal of the ratification, he’s been in the crosshairs of Jeep management in Toledo. First they gave him a reprimand for something he didn’t do. Then when literature supporting him appeared in the plant, management threatened him with discipline, including possible discharge, for distributing literature—even though he was not the one distributing the literature! Well, it turns out that, by prohibiting George’s alleged distribution, the company was violating the 1935 National Labor Relations Act! George filed charges and the National Labor Relations Board ordered Labor Relations to post notices stating:

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Federal law gives you the right to (1) Form, join or assist a union, (2) Choose representatives to bargain with your employer on your behalf, (3) Act together with other employees for your benefit and protection, and (4) Choose not to engage in any of these protected activities.

We recognize employees have the right to distribute appropriate written materials seeking fellow employees’ support in pursuing contractual claims or other rights protected under the National Labor Relations Act, as long as that distribution occurs in non-work areas and on non-work time. Thus, we will not discipline, threaten, or otherwise retaliate against employees for engaging in such protected activity. Further, we will rescind the verbal reprimand issued to George Windau at the Toledo Assembly Complex (Jeep) on December 15, 2011, and notify him that we have done so in writing.

/signed/ Ronda May, Labor Relations Supervisor Toledo Assembly Complex

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Standing up is the right thing to do. Thank you sisters and brothers for your support.

George Windau, millwright, Jeep Unit, Local 12, Toledo, Ohio

Martha Grevatt, diemaker, Local 869, Warren, Michigan

Alex Wassell, welder repair, Local 869, Warren, Michigan