

Why I will be voting No

~ Nick Waun

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We have yet to see this year's tentative national agreement with General Motors. It would be nice if they posted it all online so that the rank and file can read it. Given past practice, that is unlikely. For sure we will get some sugar coated highlights, and plenty of rumors from the press; but what I want is a chance to read the actual contract language that I am expected to vote on. So far I haven't heard anything in the media that sounds encouraging.

When the parties went into these negotiations I, along with others, expected a bounce back from the 2009 contract modifications. We knew this contract would be lean, but many believed it reasonable that it would reverse the modification concessions and take us back to where we were with the 2007 UAW-GM National Agreement. We expected that the bridge from tier two to tier one would be restored. We expected our Cost of Living adjustments to be given back so that we could at least tread water until 2015. We also expected some relief from the restrictive work rules that are making it harder for us to make the best vehicles in the world. What it looks like we are getting, and I have heard others say this as well, is a slap in the face.

In 2009 we faced bankruptcy. Hourly workers at GM and Chrysler were asked to vote on changes to our contracts to avoid having a bankruptcy judge void them. The two criteria that we are stuck with until 2015 are no-strike, and an entry-level class of workers. All other concessions were temporary, and nothing restricted us from creating a plan for letting the lower wage tier graduate to the top tier. Instead, what our negotiators appear to have done was burn the bridges to the past, and they created a new paradigm in the auto-industry.

From what I have heard so far, the tier 2 will have no mechanism for graduating to the top tier wage. That means they are stuck there. Surely it is reasonable to expect that some of them at the top of their seniority bracket would have moved up by now if we were operating under the terms of the 2007 agreements. If UAW President Bob King considers himself an honorable man, he should honor promises that were made to those people long ago.

Our COLA was frozen in 2009, just before the bankruptcy. If you take into account that the inflation rate is 3.8%, the value of \$28.12 has been eroding since 2009 at a compounded rate. The spending power of \$28.12 by 2015 will be worth what \$21.17 was worth in 2009. By default we are getting a pay cut every year by not having our wages adjusted for inflation. To replace this would have been insignificant to the bottom line on the company's balance sheet. To not replace this means that the lower tier wage becomes the new wage at the Detroit 3.

Something also needs to be addressed regarding the state of our work rules. Details about this are scant, and no doubt many will be scouring whatever information becomes available to look for any changes. I'm not holding my breath expecting major improvements. It appears this area of the contracts may have been one of the least important to the bargainers, but it is where most of the grievances come from. The infamous "Doc. 8" in the GM contract has created a harsh attendance regime for GM workers. Its three strikes and you're out...for good! I hear the Chrysler contract is similar. Other major complaints include forced rotation on jobs, not being able to vote for team leaders, and our breaks are too short. These issues may seem trivial to

someone not acquainted to working on an assembly line, but to the worker an extra 5 minutes can mean a major improvement to their health and sanity.

So far I have seen little justification for approving this contract. Bob King and Co. may ultimately get what they want, but it will not be with my consent. Fear of the unknown should not keep us from voting our conscience. I plan to vote no. The UAW and GM should go back to the table and rework the deal. What we have now is unpalatable. Whatever the final deal, it will no doubt be bad, but they can do better than what they have now.

In Solidarity,

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