

Does Bob King have a Political Agenda?

On Friday President Obama, along with the South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, will be visiting GM's Lake Orion Assembly. They will announce the signing of the Korean-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, also known as (K.O.R.U.S). UAW President Bob King is expected to attend. King endorses the deal.

Just under sixteen months ago, former UAW President Ron Gettelfinger sat for his last interview as Union President with WXYZ-TV Detroit. One thing he said was this, "*We're gonna oppose agreements like the Korean-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. That is [a] one sided agreement that's, in clearly, in the favor of South Korea, and it's gonna hurt our industry here.*"

That interview with Ron Gettelfinger took place long after President Obama took office, and the GM bankruptcy was a done deal. Clearly it was not part of the UAW's agenda to support Free Trade. That all changed after Bob King took over the top job at the Union.

Back in 2009, the Obama administration was pushing to bring a small South Korean car to a U.S. Detroit Three assembly plant. That car, then called the Chevrolet Aveo, but now called the Chevrolet Sonic, is currently being assembled at the Lake Orion plant. President Obama's visit to Orion to ink the deal would seem to indicate that the Sonic is a political test run of the President's "job creation" plan via free trade. This is the same administration that put Orion Assembly in limbo status in the first place by demanding the elimination of the Pontiac brand. Orion's previous product was the popular Pontiac G6, a profit maker for the automaker.

Curiously, Bob King's endorsement of the Korean Free Trade Agreement runs counter to the views of most other Union leaders. Both the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters presidents are opposed. Some in King's own Union are mystified as to their leader's motivation for supporting it. Many assume it is political payback for the Federal bankruptcy loans. However, that did not seem to be the case just before Ron Gettelfinger left office.

So what's going on with Bob? King is an energetic labor leader who is limited to one term because of his age, yet would seem to have many active years ahead of him. Last February, President Obama named Bob King to the National Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations. Could this be an indication of things to come?

Let's say hypothetically that King was angling for a cabinet position in the Obama 2.0 administration. If that were true, and I am just speculating here, then could his judgment on the matter of the K.O.R.U.S possibly be clouded by his ambitions?

Here is what is clear about this; American workers will now be forced to compete with third world wages. This means lower pay for American Autoworkers. Secondary jobs, those in the service industry that depend on others having discretionary income to spend, will slowly disappear as a result. In the long run this will drive down purchasing power and standards of living.

At Lake Orion this is already happening. During the 2010 negotiations to bring the Sonic small car to Orion, General Motors demanded that initially 40 percent of all employees be paid half the standard Autoworker wage. After that all future employees at Orion are to be paid the lower wage. New employees will never have the chance to move up to the middle class wages that decades of Autoworkers before them worked hard to earn.

My guess is that Bob King is nodding along because he wants to join the Obama administration; not because it is what's best for his membership.

Nick Waun

Autoworker
UAW Local 1112, Lordstown OH