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UCC 1-207: Section 1-207 Supersedes the Common Law Doctrine of Accord and Satisfaction in Situations Involving the Tender of Negotiable Instruments in Full Satisfaction of Disputed Claims

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interpretation of section 2-725 does not limit available remedies. The language of the decision indicates a pronounced bias toward the use of strict tort remedies and against the use of warranty remedies in cases of personal injury. It is therefore submitted that the Heller decision may mark the inception of a trend in which the court will continue to place obstacles, both procedural and substantive, in the path of consumers seeking to bring personal injury suits based on breach of warranty. Moreover, the practical effect of the Heller decision is to frustrate the legislative purpose, embodied in the present version of section 2-318, of providing plaintiffs with an additional cause of action against remote seller.

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UCC 1-207: Section 1-207 supersedes the common law doctrine of accord and satisfaction in situations involving the tender of negotiable instruments in full satisfaction of disputed claims

In New York, the common law doctrine of accord and satisfaction has been recognized as a means by which parties could settle disputed debts without resort to judicial intervention. Under this
doctrine, a creditor’s acceptance of a check for less than the amount claimed due discharged the debt if the check included a


Because an accord and satisfaction is a contract, all of the essential elements of a contract must be present for it to be valid and effective. Komp v. Raymond, 175 N.Y. 102, 107-08, 67 N.E. 113, 115 (1903). These elements include a proper subject matter, competent parties, adequate consideration and mutual assent. Id. at 108, 67 N.E. at 115.

To be binding, an accord and satisfaction must be based upon an unliquidated prior claim. See Naissoy v. Tomlinson, 148 N.Y. 326, 330, 42 N.E. 715, 716 (1896). A claim is unliquidated when there is a genuine dispute as to the amount due. See id.; Carlton Credit Corp. v. Atlantic Refining Co., 12 App. Div. 2d 613, 613, 208 N.Y.S.2d 622, 623, (1st Dep’t 1960) (mem.), aff’d, 10 N.Y.2d 723, 176 N.E.2d 837, 219 N.Y.S.2d 269 (1961); see also Schuttinger v. Woodruff, 259 N.Y. 212, 216, 181 N.E. 361, 364 (1932) (must be genuine controversy concerning amount due). When a claim is unliquidated or disputed, the tender of less than the amount claimed owed is sufficient consideration for an accord. 6 A. CORBIN, supra, § 1288, at 160; see also Forster v. Manufacturers’ Trust Co., 267 N.Y. 371, 374, 196 N.E. 294, 295 (1935) (accord and satisfaction in stock claim operated as release).


In Nassoy v. Tomlinson, 148 N.Y. 326, 331, 42 N.E. 715, 716-17 (1896), the Court of
notation indicating that it was offered as full settlement. Under the common law, a payee could not reserve his right to the balance of the claimed debt when negotiating or indorsing a "full payment" check. Recently, however, in *Horn Waterproofing Corp. v. Bushwick Iron & Steel Co.* the New York Court of Appeals held that section 1-207 of the Uniform Commercial Code (the Code)

Appeals explained why cashing a full payment check effects an accord and satisfaction: "[The creditor] cannot be permitted to assert that he did not understand that a sum of money offered 'in full' was not, when accepted, a payment in full... When he indorsed and collected the check, ... it was the same, in legal effect, as if he had signed and returned the receipt, because acceptance of the check was a conclusive election to be bound by the condition upon which the check was accepted. The use of the check was an acceptance of the condition... The minds of the parties then met so as to constitute an accord..." *Id.*


6 N.Y.U.C.C. § 1-207 (McKinney's 1964). Section 1-207 provides:

A party who with explicit reservation of rights performs or promises performance or assents to performance in a manner demanded or offered by the other party does not thereby prejudice the rights reserved. Such words as "without prejudice" or "under protest" or the like are sufficient.

*Id.*

The legislative history surrounding New York's adoption of § 1-207 suggests that the section was intended to alter the doctrine of accord and satisfaction. Hawkland, *The Effect of UCC § 1-207 on the Doctrine of Accord and Satisfaction by Conditional Check*, 74 Com. L.J. 329, 332 (1969). The strongest support for this proposition comes from the appended "New York Annotations," derived from a 1961 report of the New York State Commission on
permits a payee to preclude an accord and satisfaction when accepting a “full payment” check by using an indorsement that explicitly reserves his rights.\(^7\)

In *Horn*, the plaintiff entered into an oral contract with the defendant for the repair of a leaking roof on the defendant’s building.\(^8\) After completing two days of work, the plaintiff determined that a new roof was required and submitted a bill for $1,080 for the work already performed.\(^9\) The defendant disputed the value of

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\(^7\) 66 N.Y.2d at 332, 488 N.E.2d at 62, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 316.


\(^9\) 66 N.Y.2d at 322, 488 N.E.2d at 56, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 310.

the work performed and sent the plaintiff a check for $500 which bore a notation indicating that it was tendered in full payment for the plaintiff's services. The plaintiff indorsed the check, adding the words "under protest," and deposited the $500 into its account. The plaintiff sued to recover the balance of the bill in the Civil Court, Queens County. The defendant's motion to dismiss, denied below, was granted by the Appellate Division. The Appellate Division reasoned that because the underlying contract was for services, section 1-207 of the code was inapplicable. Thus, the court dismissed the action on the basis of accord and satisfaction.

In a strong dissent, Judge Weinstein asserted that the common law rule as applied to creditors was inequitable and suggested that the Code should be given a more liberal construction to promote its underlying policies and purposes. The Court of Appeals reversed the decision below and held that the plaintiff's reservation of rights was effective, concluding that the doctrine of accord and satisfaction is replaced by section

481 N.Y.S.2d 125, 126 (2d Dep't 1984) (mem). Id. The plaintiff in Horn originally sent a bill to the defendant for $1,241.92, but when the defendant disputed the value of the work done, the plaintiff submitted a revised bill for $1,080. Id.

66 N.Y.2d at 322, 488 N.E.2d at 57, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 311. In Horn, the back of the check contained the notation "This check is accepted in full payment, settlement, satisfaction, release and discharge of any and all claims and/or demands of whatsoever kind and nature." Id.


Id. at 686, 481 N.Y.S.2d at 127.

1-207 when negotiable instruments are used in full payment tenders. The Court compared the application of the common law rule in New York with the legislative history of section 1-207 and concluded that the latter reflected “a fairer policy in debtor-creditor transactions.” Despite strong arguments of commentators to the contrary, Judge Jasen ruled that the “plain language of the provision, ‘without much stretching,’ would seem applicable to a full payment check.” Judge Jasen mentioned the Report of The Commission on Uniform State Laws to the Legislature of the State of New York as strong support that section 1-207 was not restricted to situations such as the acceptance of an incomplete shipment of goods or other performance in part. The court also emphasized that the location of section 1-207 in the introductory article of the Code and the expansive language of the section indicated that it was meant to be applied to all “Code-covered” commercial transactions. Judge Jasen reasoned that to the extent full

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21 66 N.Y.2d at 325, 488 N.E.2d at 58, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 312; see supra note 8.

22 Id. at 327-28, 488 N.E.2d at 60, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 314.

23 Id. at 324, 488 N.E.2d at 58, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 312.

24 See, e.g., CORBIN ON CONTRACTS, § 1279 at 396 (C. Knafman ed. 2d ed. Supp. 1982); Hawkland, supra note 6, at 332; Rosenthal, Discord and Dissatisfaction: Section 1-207 of the Uniform Commercial Code, 78 COLUM. L. REV. 48, 63-64 (1978).

25 66 N.Y.2d at 327, 488 N.E.2d at 59, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 313. The Horn Court noted that the Official Comments to the Code are subject to a variety of interpretations because they do not specifically address the doctrine of accord and satisfaction. Id. at 327-28, 488 N.E.2d at 59-60, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 313-14; accord Hawkland, supra note 6, at 331; Rosenthal, supra note 24, at 63.

26 66 N.Y.2d at 329-29, 488 N.E.2d at 60-61, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 314-16.

27 Id. at 329, 488 N.E.2d at 61, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 315. Article I of the Code serves a two-fold function, setting forth basic definitions for use in the rest of the Code and stating principles of law applicable to non-Code commercial transactions. 1 R. ANDERSON, supra note 19, § 1-101:9, at 7.

Although technically the Code is to be applied only to substantive matters covered in Articles II through IX, it is often applied to non Code situations by analogy. 1 R. ANDERSON, supra note 19, § 1-101:16, at 15; see, e.g., Cable-Wiedemer, Inc. v. A. Friederich & Sons Co., 71 Misc. 2d 443, 445-46, 336 N.Y.S.2d 139, 141-42 (Monroe County Ct. 1972) (construction
payment tenders employ negotiable instruments as the form of payment, they are Article III transactions governed by section 1-207 regardless of the underlying contract. Finally, the court noted that this construction of the section would “liberalize, or ‘detechnorcalize’” the law governing full payment check tenders.

Although application of the accord and satisfaction doctrine to full payment check tenders seems to provide an efficient method for private settlement of disputed claims, the inequities of the doctrine become apparent in situations involving overreaching debtors who seek to force settlement on unwilling creditors. It is submitted that to the extent that the Court of Appeals may have minimized the opportunity for such overreaching in full payment check tenders, the Horn decision is worthy of praise. However, the court also sought to dismiss all doubts as to whether section 1-207 supersedes the common law with respect to full payment tenders, and declared that the section applies to any tender of a negotiable


The Court noted that one commentator otherwise opposed to interpreting § 1-207 as superseding the doctrine of accord and satisfaction conceded that a full payment check is a Code covered transaction subject to § 1-207 regardless of the underlying contract. 66 N.Y.2d at 330, 488 N.E.2d at 61, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 315-16 (citing Rosenthal, supra note 24, at 70).

29 66 N.Y.2d at 331, 488 N.E.2d at 62, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 316 (summarizing Judge Weinstein’s Appellate Division dissent). The stated purposes of the Code are, inter alia, to simplify, clarify and modernize the law governing commercial transactions, to permit the growth of commercial practices through custom, usage and agreement, and to provide uniform commercial law to all jurisdictions. N.Y. U.C.C. § 1-102 (McKinney 1964).

30 See Note, Accord and Satisfaction: The Full Payment Check, 3 Det. C.L. Rev. 621, 644 (1982). Accord and satisfaction has been described as an effective compromise tool for use in such areas as: “Mutual Discharge of Reciprocal Obligations,” 6 A. Corbin, supra note 1, § 1286, at 157; and “Settlement of Doubtful, Disputed or Otherwise Unliquidated Claims.” Id. § 1288, at 159.

31 See Note, UCC Section 1-207 and the Full Payment Check: The Struggle Between the Code and the Common Law — Where Do the Debtor and Creditor Fit In?, 7 U. Dayton L. Rev. 421, 432 (1982). In certain contexts, creditors might feel compelled to take what little they can get in a full payment tender for fear that they would otherwise be remediless. See generally Note, Role of the Check in Accord and Satisfaction: Weapon of the Overreaching Debtor, 97 U. Pa. L. Rev. 99, 104-09 (1948) (accord and satisfaction used as weapon in landlord/tenant, insurance and employment contracts).

32 66 N.Y.2d at 330, 488 N.E.2d at 61-62, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 315-16. The Horn Court declared that “a debtor’s tender of a full payment check is an Article III transaction governed by section 1-207, regardless of the nature of the contract underlying the parties’ commercial relationship.” Id.
instrument as full payment of a disputed claim. It is submitted that the sweeping language of the decision may have been premature. Although the court indicated that its application of section 1-207 is consistent with the recognized policies of the Code, it has been suggested that the reservation of rights allowed by the section may in some instances breach the good faith requirements of the Code. Additionally, at least one commentator has suggested that a better interpretation of section 1-207 would focus on the "explicitness" required of the reservation provided thereunder. If requiring timely notification of a reservation of rights under section 1-207 were required, the good faith of creditors seeking to vary the terms of conditional offers would be ensured, and those who fail to comply with the good faith requirements of the Code would be relegated to the harsher common law doctrine of accord and satisfaction. Finally, it is suggested that rather than clarifying the law of commercial transactions, the Horn decision may simply serve to warn debtors which forms of payment will no longer be applicable to full payment tenders.

While the Court of Appeals' decision in Horn purported to render the commercial law more simple, clear and uniform, it is submitted that the decision has fallen short of its goal. Nevertheless, the case has established a uniform rule for all transactions involving the tender of negotiable instruments in full satisfaction of a claim.

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33 Id. at 328-27, 488 N.E.2d at 59, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 313.
34 Id. at 327 n.6, 488 N.E.2d at 60 n.6, 497 N.Y.S.2d at 314 n.6.
35 CORBIN, supra note 24, § 1279, at 473. To allow the recipient of a check, tendered under the reasonable expectation that acceptance would constitute full settlement, to vary the terms of the acceptance by placing his own markings on the instrument would be a breach of the good faith requirements of the Code. Id.
36 See Caraballo, supra note 19, at 454-56. The term "explicit," though not defined by the Code, implies that the offeree must notify the offeror of the rejection of full settlement payment to make a reservation effective. Id. at 455.
37 Id.
38 See id. at 458.
39 It has been noted that it is possible for a debtor in a non-Code transaction to tender as full payment an instrument excluded from the Code by section 3-105(2)(a) and thereby avoid any implication of the Code. See Rosenthal, supra note 24, at 71.