

Demand release of full details and two weeks to vote

Contract “framework” at GM Canada continues attack on autoworkers

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The agreement reached by Unifor with General Motors Canada in the early morning hours of Tuesday, September 20 marks a new stage in the corporate-union gang-up against autoworkers. In the wake of the announcement that the two parties had agreed to the “framework” for a tentative deal covering GM’s 4,000 workers, the union is moving as rapidly as possible to push through the deal.

Unifor has scheduled simultaneous votes in Oshawa, St. Catharines and Woodstock this Sunday. Details of the agreement—which has not even been finalized—have not been released to rank-and-file workers, yet workers are expected to vote on it in five days.

The speed with which the vote is being pushed through points to the extreme anxiety on the part of Unifor that if workers really familiarized themselves with whatever final contract terms eventually emerge, they would never accept it.

Opposition is already beginning to grow. One worker on the union’s AutoTalks16 Facebook page said, “I know how it works, you show it to the members, praise it as the best deal ever and scare them to death that if they don’t vote for it they will lose their jobs and then make them vote. If anyone wants to leak me the deal send it my way. I’d love to see what binding guarantees are for investment. Sounds to me like Unifor and GM are going begging to Wynne and Trudeau for some of that sweet corporate welfare! Sickening.”

Rank-and-file workers should demand the immediate release of the full contract—not phony “highlights”—and two full weeks to study it before any vote. In every factory, rank-and-file workers should elect action committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of Dias and the other Unifor bureaucrats,

defeat this sell-out and formulate their own demands.

GM workers should appeal to Ford and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) workers for a joint strike action to abolish the two-tier wage system, restore all pensions, win a 35 percent wage increase and defend all jobs. An appeal must also be made to workers in the United States, Mexico and around the world to oppose the attacks of the transnational auto giants and the governments that back them.

Absolutely nothing Unifor President Jerry Dias says can be taken at face value. The intention of Dias and the rest of the executives who run the organization is to conceal or sugar-coat the true nature of the deal and force through the contract before workers have had time to study the hundreds of pages of content and their full implications. This will pave the way for similar rotten agreements at Ford and FCA.

Surrounded by fellow union executives and with a backdrop reading, “Invest in Canada,” Dias said the four-year deal “had turned the tide” of job cuts in Canada and won “hundreds of millions of dollars in new investments.” This included new but unnamed product commitments, he said, for GM’s giant Oshawa plant outside of Toronto, an engine plant in St. Catharines and a parts distribution facility in Woodstock.

That Dias can be “thrilled” by a framework that disposes of almost 800 jobs on Oshawa’s Consolidated Line is telling. For Unifor, “good contracts” now consist of plant closures, the destruction of any semblance of defined benefit pensions for new hires, the maintenance of the hated two-tier wage system, paltry wage increases, more speed-up and a signing bonus to bribe hard-pressed workers to hold their nose

and vote for ratification.

Indeed, Dias was even reluctant to announce any details of the “economic package.” The Unifor functionaries are fully aware of the deep opposition from workers who have endured a ten-year wage freeze under conditions where GM has made money hand-over-fist on the back of three consecutive concessions contracts and a near \$11 billion government bailout in 2009.

Dias gushed that “there will be hiring, both long-term and short-term” as new investment in St. Catharines and the Oshawa Flex plant takes hold. Both GM management and Unifor know full well that any expansion of plant volume or new product will be covered by an ever increasing second- or third-tier of workers at inferior wage and benefit packages. For over a year, like a cheap labour contractor, Dias has been touting the high number of veteran workers eligible for retirement as the key to GM’s drive for even higher profits for its well-heeled shareholders.

But as veteran autoworkers already know, whatever “job security” promises are made are not worth the paper (or “framework”) they are printed on. Unifor and its predecessor, the Canadian Auto Workers, have repeatedly announced such deals—based on ever-greater concessions—only to see automotive employment in Canada halved since 2000. At GM alone, the numbers have fallen from 19,000 in 2002 to 4,000.

The 2008 closure announcement of GM’s Oshawa Truck Plant is a case in point. At the ratification meetings for the freshly signed GM contract, then union president Buzz Hargrove claimed that the huge array of concessions granted to the company had “saved” jobs at the Oshawa complex, particularly at the truck plant that was soon to be reduced to one shift. But only months later, GM announced the truck plant closure, citing a standard clause—never discussed at the ratification meetings—within the collective agreement that allowed them to alter product line allocations should “market conditions” change.

Hargrove, with his then lieutenant Dias at his side, feigned shock and outrage over the closing of the plant, claiming that the closure was a violation of the newly signed contract. In recent months, Dias has been asked on several occasions to explain those 2008 events. “We were too nice. We trusted GM,” he has lamely responded. Now Dias and his entire coterie of officials

have unanimously endorsed—not a contract—but a “framework” that essentially gives the giant automaker a blank check to do anything it wants.

Even setting aside givebacks and the closure of the Consolidated Line, General Motors workers should reject this contract on straight principle. It is impossible for workers to make an informed vote without at least two weeks to study the full contract and organize meetings of the rank and file, independent of the union bureaucrats, to review and debate its provisions.

Last year, US autoworkers rebelled against the United Auto Workers and defeated the first UAW-FCA contract by a two-to-one margin. This was the first rejection of a UAW-backed national contract in three decades. Rank-and-file workers used social media to organize opposition and circulated and re-circulated copies of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, which became the voice of workers and the center of the opposition.

The UAW worked hand-in-glove with the Obama administration—which slashed new hires wages in half during the bailout of GM and Chrysler—and eventually rammed the sell-outs through by resorting to lies, intimidation and fraud. There remains, however, deep opposition among US autoworkers, which can be rallied if Canadian workers take a stand to fight.

Everything depends on the independent initiative of rank-and-file workers themselves. In this fight, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will provide all the assistance possible.



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