Opposition mounts among GM Canada workers

Unifor refuses to release “contract” before Sunday vote

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In a blatantly anti-democratic move showing utter contempt towards the workers it purports to represent, the Unifor officialdom has announced on its AutoTalks 2016 Facebook page that it does not intend to share details of the “framework agreement” announced by union President Jerry Dias at his early Tuesday morning press conference until the contract ratification vote scheduled for this Sunday.

“Details on the tentative agreement that has been signed will be provided to GM members on Sunday at the ratification meeting. The bargaining committee worked hard to get a good contract for all members to defend jobs, secure investment and future jobs, and the union pushed back on the use of temporary workers,” the Unifor statement claimed.

The Unifor bureaucrats clearly think that the thousands of workers who labour in the Canadian General Motors facilities are complete fools. They will be asked to vote on an “agreement” that Dias himself stated on Tuesday morning had not even been completed. The statement released by Unifor in its AutoTalks 2016 page does not even make clear if this so-called framework has been rounded into a finalized document. Nor does it say if the membership will even receive the full contract before voting. Only “details” will be released—no doubt phony, self-serving “highlights.” Indeed, considering the highly parsed double-talk in the union announcement, it is highly likely that the final contract has not even been concluded.

Moreover, union officials have indicated that this will-of-the wisp deal will be in the order of hundreds of pages. Even in the entirely doubtful occurrence that Unifor releases the full text of the agreement at its Sunday ratification meetings, how can autoworkers study, discuss and digest all of its clauses and their implications on the spur of the moment before they are hustled into the voting area?

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers to place no faith in anything that Dias or his fellow union bureaucrats say. Workers must demand that they be given the full contract with two weeks to study the document before a vote is held. If this demand is not met, they must vote a resounding “No” to whatever “pig-in-a-poke” is placed in front of them on Sunday.

Workers have not forgotten the 2008 union debacle around the closure announcement at the Oshawa Truck Plant, where, after lying assurances by then-union President Buzz Hargrove that a new contract guaranteed the continuation of work at the plant, GM announced shortly after ratification that a contract clause clearly gave them the right to shut it down.

Even the details of the 2016 “economic package”—that is, wages, benefits, retirement incentives, signing bonuses, etc.—key parts of any deal, will only be sprung on the membership at the last minute. Dias’ stammering avoidance of these basic items at his press conference demonstrated clearly that, as GM continues to make profits hand-over-fist, virtually nothing will be dispensed to the workers who produce those profits. Of course, in this regard, Dias is counting on the fact that after a 10-year wage freeze under grueling speed-up in the plants, he can convince his membership to be pleased with any crumbs on offer.

The chaotic to-and-fro of Canadian media outlets over the past two days regarding leaked information on the nature of the “new product” supposedly ear-marked for Oshawa gives further cause to believe that nothing has been firmly worked out between GM and the union. Dias’ fidgeting and non-committal responses to press inquiries Tuesday morning on what “new product” was actually agreed to is telling. On Wednesday it was reported that

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the “new product” would be unfinished SUV bodies from GM’s plant in Arlington, Texas shipped to Oshawa for completion. Yet by Wednesday night, this had been kyboshed with new reports stating that official but unnamed sources had indicated that the arrangement involved pickup truck bodies from the Ft. Wayne, Indiana plant.

The announcement at global GM headquarters on Wednesday that its forecast for 2016 profits is up to $6 (US) per share and that it expects now to exceed its cost-saving target of $5.5 billion worldwide by 2018 shows that the company continues with its strategy of “rationalizations” on the backs of autoworkers. The institution of the inferior, risky defined contributions pension scheme for new hires will only serve to further line the pockets of GM shareholders and corporate executives as the workforce in the auto plants is steadily reduced to a preponderant second-tier cheap labour pool.

Unifor’s refusal to release any details about the agreement is a tacit acknowledgment that if workers learned what was really agreed to, they would decisively repudiate yet another round of concessions and givebacks justified in the name of “job security.”

Rank-and-file members are already increasingly voicing their opposition to Dias’ attempt to ram through his highly dubious agreement.

On the union’s own AutoTalks2016 Facebook page, one worker wrote, “[S]ay the new product is just over-flow from the US Silverado plant. What happens if sales slow down?...Members need to know more details before ratification.” Unifor did not respond.

Another worker wrote, “Jerry Dias said product is guaranteed [and] that what happened at the truck plant won’t happen at the car plant. I wish that could be taken to the bank. It strikes me as funny that it took until late Monday night that product was given to Oshawa. Something seems not right.” Unifor did not respond.

Other autoworkers posted shorter comments. Among them, “Selling out incoming workers should not be a congratulatory event” and, “The contract is a joke. You sold out pensioners, new hires and everybody in between.” Another worker asked, “Is ‘framework’ a contract? No. Not that I’m aware of. There was no tentative agreement announced. How sad.”

When Unifor officials began deleting posts by workers who had attached articles from the *World Socialist Web Site* and the *Autoworker Newsletter*, workers simply began posting excerpts from the articles and directing members to the original source. Members took the advice.

One worker wrote to us, “Unifor told us in the last contract ratification that with concessions to new hires and our benefits that it would allow us to be more competitive. These concessions would spur new investments in Canada. Now, four years later, with the companies making healthy profits and the dollar dropping some 30 percent, we are told by the union that they cannot afford to go after cost-of-living allowances for retirees…They cannot afford to go after better benefits and pay. All the while top union officials receive better pensions than those on the floor.”

Typical of other comments sent directly to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* were: “My union dues are being wasted when we line workers are being bullied into signing an agreement that is not fully disclosed until last minute. Why are we not insisting that our union officials be transparent?” Another remarked, “Dias’ announcement Monday night was a joke. A ‘framework’ of a tentative agreement? WTF is that? Next contract they’ll be signaling a deal when the company picks up the phone as a reminder that the contract is up…”

Deep opposition to the corporate-union gang-up against autoworkers on both sides of the Canada-US border continues to grow. Everything depends on the independent initiative of rank-and-file workers themselves. Action committees must be formed to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the Unifor bureaucracy, appeal for support from workers across Canada and autoworkers in the US, Mexico and internationally, and beat back the concessions demands of management and the unions. In this fight, the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* will provide all the assistance possible.

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