

Vote “No” on GM Canada contract

Build rank-and-file committees to resist Unifor sellout!

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Unifor is determined to force through a new four-year agreement with General Motors Canada before the 4,000 autoworkers it claims to represent have had any chance to read and study its provisions.

Important elements of the deal may not even have been finalized. That was certainly the case when Unifor President Jerry Dias appeared before the media cameras early Tuesday morning to declare that a “framework” agreement had been reached so as to block the first auto worker strike in 20 years against the Canadian operations of one of the Detroit Three.

Unifor’s deeply anti-democratic decision not to release any details on the deal prior to this Sunday’s ratification vote demonstrates that this is a rotten concessionary contract, cooked up behind closed doors by pro-management union officials and GM executives to serve the interests of GM shareholders and their big business backers.

Unifor is trying to blackmail workers by claiming that failure to ratify the agreement will endanger “job security.” This is rich coming from an organization which, together with its predecessor the Canadian Auto Workers, has negotiated one concessions-laden deal after another over the past two decades in the name of saving jobs, only then to preside over mass layoffs and plant shutdowns. While these agreements have enabled GM to rake in huge profits, the union’s “job-saving agreements” have been devastating for workers and their families—as exemplified by the near halving of the Detroit Three’s Canadian workforce since 2000 and the fact that the workers who still remain on the job have not had a wage increase in ten years.

In the current deal, Dias claims to have obtained investment commitments for the GM Oshawa plant to

keep it open beyond 2019 and additional funding for the St. Catherines’ facility. Workers should reject such bogus assurances. The volume and identity of the new products supposedly secured by Unifor are still to be formalized and appear as simple over-runs from other plants.

Moreover, the deal will be bound up with a huge reduction in workers’ wages as the result of the elimination of close to 800 jobs on the Consolidated Line at the Oshawa plant and the use of retirement incentives to open the door to a vast expansion of second tier, low-wage labour. The extent of the cost-cutting to which Unifor has acceded is revealed by the fact that GM will shift some production from Mexico, where auto workers earn a fraction of their Canadian counterparts, to St. Catherines.

Demonstrating its role as a shill for the corporate bosses, Unifor has touted new GM investments based on the assumption that the federal and Ontario provincial Liberal governments will provide hundreds of millions in public funds in the form of incentives to the auto giants. As in the past when billions were forked out to GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler in the auto bailouts to line the pockets of the super-rich, this strategy will prove devastating for all sections of workers as the Liberals continue their slashing of public and social services to pay for these incentives, corporate tax cuts, military interventions abroad, and other policies aimed at boosting big business profits and interests.

The GM-Unifor agreement will retain the hated two-tier wage system, under which new hires must labour for a decade before reaching full wages.

In a major concession, Unifor has accepted the

elimination of the defined benefit pension scheme, a social gain won by workers in decades of bitter struggle. Big business can barely contain its glee, with the right-wing *National Post* crowing this week that now is the time to abolish defined benefit pension plans throughout the private and public sector.

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, not self-serving “highlights,” 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.

A “No” vote at GM would be an important first step in galvanizing the opposition of autoworkers throughout North America to the never-ending series of concessions enforced by the CAW/Unifor and United Auto Workers over the past three decades. But it can only be the beginning of a fight back. Unifor has already announced plans to open talks at Fiat Chrysler next week, with the intention of basing a final agreement for the more than 9,000 hourly workers on the same rotten concessions agreement that they are now seeking to ram down GM workers’ throats.

There is deep hostility to the UAW bureaucracy in the United States, after it resorted to similar tactics last year to impose sellout deals at Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford. A stand by GM Canada workers would win a powerful response from auto workers across North America and if animated by a new *class struggle* perspective would open the door to a working-class counter-offensive.

The devastating reversals suffered by autoworkers over the past three decades are the direct product of the nationalist and pro-capitalist policies of CAW/Unifor and the UAW. In 1985, the CAW leadership opposed a genuine challenge to the UAW Solidary House sell-outs, claiming the UAW wouldn’t support Canadian workers in opposing concessions because they were the leaders of a US-based organization, not because they subordinated autoworkers’ job and wages to the profits of the auto bosses.

The decision by the bureaucracies on both sides of the border to split the UAW along nationalist lines initiated wave after wave of concessionary agreements with the Big Three. The UAW and CAW union bureaucrats

pitted workers against one another, with the rival unions seeking to outdo each other in a race to the bottom so as to win the favour of the auto bosses with ever deeper concessions.

The CAW/Unifor and UAW have overseen a catastrophic decline in workers’ living standards, offering up the workers as cheap labour commodities for brutal exploitation.

In breaking with this reactionary record, workers must revive and develop the traditions of militant joint struggle that led Canadian auto workers to support the insurrectionary 1937 Flint sit-down strike and join with their US brothers and sisters in founding the UAW. Today when globalization has made it possible for companies to move production to whatever location in the world offers the highest returns, it is more necessary than ever for workers to have their own international strategy to coordinate their resistance to the auto bosses.

Workers at GM must move immediately to elect rank-and-file committees to take leadership and control of the contract struggle out of the hands of Unifor, which functions as an industrial police force on behalf of the auto bosses. These committees must demand time for the workers to study and debate the provisions contained within any proposed deal.

Led by the most trusted and militant workers, these rank-and-file committees must above all make an urgent appeal to fellow workers at Fiat Chrysler and Ford in Canada, autoworkers in the United States, Mexico and internationally, and workers in the public and private sectors across Canada facing similar attacks to join in a common fight to beat back the insatiable demands of big business.

In the struggle to adopt a new strategy based on a socialist program and an internationalist perspective, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* offers autoworkers at GM and throughout North America its closest collaboration. We urge those ready to fight back to contact us today to begin discussions on taking this struggle forward.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact