

GM autoworkers denounce Unifor at ratification meeting

Our reporters
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At the contract ratification vote for General Motors workers in Oshawa, supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed hundreds of copies of the statement “Vote No on GM Contract. Build rank and file committees to resist Unifor sellout!” as workers arrived to hear Unifor “highlights” of the “framework agreement.”

As workers passed by and took leaflets, many denounced the Unifor leadership for refusing to release the so-called “framework” agreement to the membership. “We really don’t know what we’re voting on. They’re only showing us the parts they want us to hear,” said one disgruntled worker.

Campaigners spoke with dozens of workers both before and after they cast their ballots at the General Motors Centre in downtown Oshawa.

“Personally, as a thirty-year veteran, this contract’s got nothing for me,” said Rob. “One of the things they were hinting at was that we’d be getting more production. A new product. Well, turns out we’re just going to be doing final assembly, with the truck bodies getting shipped in, and not the full product. In other words, the union didn’t really tell the truth.”

“I voted No,” said Eddie, a veteran worker on the Flex Line. “No incentive to retire for us older workers and the new hires get screwed altogether because the union took away a guaranteed pension. We got a whole lot of nothing. GM knows hundreds of guys are retiring in the next few years and then they can bring in kids at half the price. Jerry Dias knows it too. He’s thinking along the same lines as management. He might as well put on a suit and tie and join the company.”

Another worker who was listening to the conversation then jumped in. “Dias doesn’t need to join the company. He’s doing their bidding right where he is. Every four years we take another big haircut. I

want to know how much of a haircut the national reps have taken over the past few years. They get raises. We get givebacks.”

A retiree approached a campaigner to ask for more leaflets for his friends. “I’ve followed what you guys have been writing and I agree with a lot of it. Retirees don’t have a vote but if I did I’d be turning this deal down. No cost-of-living (COLA) for us. Our pensions keep getting eaten away. Look at this ‘highlight.’ We haven’t been getting COLA for years and now they’re gonna give fifteen hundred bucks to anyone who retired before 1987. They’re gonna save money there all right. Half those guys are already dead.”

A veteran electrician was visibly upset as he exited the building. “Even though this contract doesn’t affect me,” he began, “it’s sad to see how the younger guys are being treated. These workers, old and new, have made a hell of a lot of profit for this company, and the company just doesn’t care. The rate these young guys are getting paid, even with this new contract, is just criminal.”

Indicating the lack of confidence they had in the union, other workers who stopped to talk said they were voting for the deal even if they didn’t much like it, but only because they saw no alternative.

“You never know the fine print of these agreements,” said Dave. “I have thirty years and I’m out of here in another year. I was here when they all patted themselves on the back in 2008 that the union had ‘saved’ the Truck Plant. But it was a bunch of hooey. After we held our nose and voted for that crap of a deal, they turn around and close the plant. The deal doesn’t really hurt me. I think a lot of us older guys think the same way. It’s the new ones coming in that have to fight for what’s coming at them.”

Ryan, a veteran worker, lamented that “the contract

wasn't good, but it's as good as it's gonna get in the face of the company's opposition." However, when asked what he thought about the auto companies' strategy of pitting Canadian autoworkers against their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and internationally, he immediately fired back, "Well, we should all be one, right? No matter how GM does internationally, (CEO) Mary Barra gets a nice fat pay cheque, and millions in bonuses too. One day we're gonna shut GM down across the continent and show them who's really the boss."

One worker, in a hurry, didn't even stop to hear the Unifor "highlights" presentation. "I have better things to do than listen to Dias. It didn't take me long to put in a No vote. The contract or framework or whatever they're calling it now, it's just one big bag of crap."

Vladimir, with over twenty years on the assembly line, minced no words when calling Unifor and GM a "bunch of cowards and imperialists. There are over a thousand people here with over twenty-five years of experience, and they're getting screwed, being scammed. This is a despicable company. It makes me sick to work beside a nineteen-, twenty-year old who's only making twenty dollars for the exact same job. Something's gotta give, and I'm sure one day it will."

We encourage autoworkers at GM, Ford and Chrysler to send us their comments regarding the current contract negotiations, and to sign up for the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*—the only media publication telling the truth about Unifor's role as an errand boy for the auto bosses.



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