

Canadian autoworkers denounce contract sellout

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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter* continues to receive a flood of new reader subscriptions from workers not only from the Detroit Three facilities operating in Ontario, but from United Auto Workers (UAW) members throughout the United States who are keen to closely follow the contract struggles of their brothers and sisters in Canada.

As workers have already seen with the announcement of the sellout deal struck at GM Canada over the weekend, the pattern contract that will now be extended to Fiat-Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) and Ford will be yet another concessionary document entirely in line with a decade and more of give-back agreements and plant closures pushed through without a fight by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)/Unifor bureaucracy.

Unifor President Jerry Dias chose GM as its primary target precisely because autoworkers at its Oshawa and St. Catharines operations were facing the possibility off plant closures and might be more susceptible to blackmail threats to accept concessions or face losing their jobs.

The paltry 4 percent wage increase over four years contained in the GM agreement (actually a wage cut when inflation is factored in) under conditions of a previous 10-year wage freeze, and continued abandonment of inflation protections will now be foisted on the 19,000 autoworkers at FCA and Ford. This is under conditions where the Detroit Three continue to rake in massive profits.

Another factor in the calculations of Dias was the much lower percentage of new hires at GM (in relation to FCA and Ford) who would be more likely to reject the continuation of the two-tier wage system contained in the GM deal. The sellout agreement cemented the miserable 10-year, two-tier “grow-in” period and stripped new hires of any semblance of a defined benefits pension program. Even the 700 third-tier Supplementary Workforce Employees (SWE), some who have already labored in

GM plants for 10 years, must now enter the “grow-in” period at the very bottom of the rung. As usual, retirees received virtually nothing. All this is under conditions where no new model was assigned to Oshawa and “new work guarantees” have been exposed as little more than unsecured projections.

Over the past week, Detroit Three workers in Canada have flooded the *Autoworkers Newsletter* with bitter denunciations of Dias’s sordid double-dealing while praising the honest reporting of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter*. Below we print a representative selection. We withhold the names of the contributors so as to protect them from victimization by both the company and the union officialdom.

Workers denounced Unifor’s refusal to provide GM workers with a copy of the so-called framework agreement prior to the vote. Said an FCA Windsor veteran: “I agree with your article that enough time is not given to workers with respect to digesting any new collective agreement. I have (many) years at Chrysler and was once a full-time steward. I decided to step-down as a result of BS politics of our union office.” A GM Oshawa veteran wrote: “Contrary to the UAW, CAW/Unifor never gets to see the entire contract to be ratified. We get the highlights but not the low-lights. Sometimes it takes months to find out what was actually, but by then the agreement is ratified and nothing can be done.”

One GM Oshawa worker wrote, “This contract is a complete let-down. Dias should be ashamed of himself, not thinking he did us a big favour. You sold us out, Dias. Step down.” An SWE from Oshawa wrote, “This contract is a sham. I’m now supposedly a new hire and I don’t get benefits for another year. ...What a disgrace. This is dejavu. Remember the truck plant?” An FCA worker said, “Local 444 is a joke here in Windsor. Any way I can help you guys, do not hesitate to contact me.” A Ford Oakville worker, preparing for the battle ahead, stated,

“Transparency is key, question everything.”

A new hire at FCA wrote, “We are getting screwed. We could work at a feeder plant instead. It’s the same thing. A lot of new hires left feeder plants that had better wages and benefits and retirement packages. Not impressed!”

“Unifor is an old boys club,” wrote a GM CAMI worker in Ingersoll. “Protecting their personal interests, begging for investments to take them into their retirement by devaluing the labour market they’re supposed to enhance and protect. They’ve become a bunch of tired, paper pushing dabbler in social issues and politics. They’re out of touch with their membership. Of 300,000 members Dias has less than 7,000 Twitter followers and Unifor has less than 1,500. Their presence and duties in the workplace are minimal too”.

A Ford Windsor worker wrote: “Ford better not try and bring us a concession packed contract like GM did. Ford had better start with the same signing bonus they gave the UAW last year with significant wage, pension and benefit improvements. There better be retirement incentives and a new engine investment program or they will receive an overwhelming NO vote from Windsor! The Big 3 are making record breaking profits and they don’t want to give anything back to a workforce that gave up so much. Enough is enough. I bet the management and executive board have gotten raises and bonuses for the last ten years while we haven’t even seen a penny raise. It’s time for Ford to pony up and give us back what we gave up for the past ten years!”

A Brampton FCA worker expressed skepticism in the new investment promises touted by Unifor: “Brampton Assembly doesn’t just need paint shop upgrades. We also want the next generation of our products. FCA can promise hundreds of millions of dollars for the paint shop then cancel it because of economic or market conditions. The whole plant needs upgrading including the body shop which has second-hand robots.”

A GM Oshawa retiree who started in 1964 shared his experience, expressing dissatisfaction with the then much-ballyhooed split of Canadian autoworkers from their brothers and sisters in the United States, members of the UAW. The 1985 nationalist split allowed the companies to launch a decades-long “whip-sawing” of contracts back and forth across the border, pitting workers against one another in a never-ending race to the bottom. “After being in the plant for only two-weeks, we went on strike and we were all told to get on down to the union hall and join up. ... We have seen all kinds of dirty tricks in the union and during strikes. In the past few years retirees have been

used over and over again and today our pensions and benefits have been ruined. Others working at non-union shops have better benefits than we do now.”

Another worker expressed support for the international unity of the working class: “I read your articles with great interest. I have worked at FCA Brampton for 28 years and from where I stand, the only way to beat these concessionary agreements and threats of job loss is to use the same tactics as the companies. The unions are only concerned for their own jurisdiction, segregating the workers. The companies have a global workforce. The unions need to start thinking globally as well. ... Every contract it’s the same thing. We must give something up or the jobs are gone. I think of those before us who fought so hard to get the benefits we are now giving us. ... It’s truly sad to see how toothless the union has become in the years I’ve been a member. It does not bode well for future workers.”

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter* is fighting to unite workers not only across Canada but internationally in an independent struggle against the pro-company stooges that run the unions. In the wake of the sellout at GM, autoworkers are preparing to confront both the auto bosses and the union officialdom. In the fight to forge a new strategy based on a socialist program and an internationalist perspective, we offer autoworkers throughout North America our closest collaboration. We urge those ready to fight back to contact us today to begin discussions on taking this struggle forward.



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