

Unifor thwarts strike by Canadian Fiat-Chrysler autoworkers

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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding an information call-in meeting for autoworkers in Canada and the US on Wednesday, October 12 at 7:00 pm Eastern Time. To participate, dial 438-800-2937 in Canada and 213-416-1560 in the US and enter PIN 581 991 086#.

Unifor President Jerry Dias appeared before the press just before midnight Monday to announce that the union (formerly known as the Canadian Auto Workers) had reached a rotten concessions agreement with Fiat-Chrysler (FCA) modelled on the 4-year contract that it rammed through at General Motors Canada in the face of widespread opposition two weeks ago.

Dias' attempt to portray the agreement as a great victory for FCA workers is absurd. It maintains the hated two-tier system under which it takes a decade for "new hires" to progress to the regular wage and will provide workers who have not seen a wage increase in a decade token increases totaling just 4 percent over the life of the agreement.

The union is touting an FCA commitment to invest \$325 million to upgrade the paint shop at the company's Brampton plant. However, FCA has made no commitment to a new model for the plant, where no new investment has been made since 2011. In comments to the *WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter*, FCA workers have insisted that as well as an upgrade to the paint shop, commitments to produce new vehicles at Brampton are required if future job cuts are to be avoided.

Acknowledging that the future of the Brampton plant is far from secure, Dias said that Unifor will be meeting with federal and Ontario government officials in the near future to press them for aid for FCA and the other Detroit Three automakers. In other words, the union will be pushing for more public funds to be made

available to boost the bottom line of the auto giants via handouts and tax concessions, while public services are cut for the supposed want of money and workers face more concessions.

The pro-corporate character of the deal was made clear by Dias, who boasted that it would "make Fiat-Chrysler a very profitable concern." He also explicitly praised the intervention of FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne, who met with Dias and his bargaining team in Toronto Saturday.

"I appreciated his candid conversation," said Dias, without ever explaining what the auto boss said. One can be certain, however, that he repeated previous threats that labor costs in Canada must be reduced if the automaker is to invest in Canada.

Dias declared the tentative agreement to be a great victory for newly hired workers, including the 1,700 new hires taken on by FCA over the past year. This is a fraud. The modest pay increases enjoyed by new hires will barely keep pace with inflation and will prove to be a huge boon for FCA as older workers retire from the plants.

From FCA's point of view, the drop in value in the Canadian dollar over the past five years, which has fallen by almost a quarter, is also providing major cost-savings.

Moreover, as at GM, all new hires will be placed on a defined contributions pension, meaning they have no guaranteed pension for their retirement and what benefits they do receive will be entirely reliant on the vagaries of the stock market.

Dias conceded that jobs will be lost at the Etobicoke casting plant, but claimed that the 150-200 workers who will lose their jobs will be able to transfer into the Brampton assembly plant: under conditions where no new product has been secured for Brampton after 2019.

He also held out hope that FCA will invest in the Etobicoke plant. For the moment, according to the union, the automaker has agreed to a \$6.5 million machinery upgrade.

Earlier in the day, Dias reassured the auto bosses of his determination to impose another concessions-laden deal to avert a strike, telling the *Detroit News*, “I am very confident we’re going to come to an agreement tonight.”

Workers must vote down this deal at the ratification meetings planned by Unifor for this weekend. Like at GM, Unifor will present Fiat-Chrysler workers with phony “highlights” and urge them to vote in favour of an agreement that they will never see in full. A decisive “no” vote can serve as the starting point to organize a genuine fight back against wave after wave of concessions imposed by the unions in collusion with the auto bosses.

Workers should demand at least two weeks to study any agreement in full and establish rank-and-file committees in the plants to discuss and debate its provisions. These committees must serve as the means to seize control of the struggle out of the hands of the Unifor bureaucrats and launch a counter-offensive against all concessions in alliance with autoworkers at GM and Ford, in the United States, and internationally.

Nothing said about this alleged agreement by Dias and his fellow union bureaucrats can be taken at face value. At GM, Unifor concluded a “tentative agreement” at the last minute to thwart a strike and rammed it through with the fraudulent claim that investment guarantees had been secured. In truth, as has since become clear, these guarantees amount to little more than a commitment to shift overflow production from US plants to Oshawa and even this is dependent on government monies whose terms have not been finalized.

According to the union, as late as Monday evening FCA was still balking at the concessionary GM “pattern settlement” considering it “too rich.” Reports in the *Windsor Star* indicate that FCA was pressing for an increased use of temporary workers in its plants. Predictably, Dias made no mention of this at his midnight press conference.

Significantly, Dias had indicated earlier on Monday that he would be prepared to “finesse” the so-called “pattern” to satisfy management if it helped secure

“investment.” The Unifor president said he was less concerned about the “economics” of the deal than about investment commitments for Brampton and Etobicoke.

Unifor’s reactionary agenda is based on the nationalist politics pursued by the union since its split with the United Auto Workers in 1985. Ever since, union bureaucrats in both the UAW and Canadian Auto Workers/Unifor have bullied workers into accepting one round of concessions after another, pitting Canadian autoworkers against their US counterparts in a race to the bottom. The result has been continuously declining living standards for autoworkers on both sides of the border and record profits for the Detroit Three.

A massive campaign of intimidation and blackmail will now be launched against Fiat-Chrysler workers. Dias and the Unifor officialdom have sought to justify their capitulation to management in the name of “solidarity,” and they will now demand that FCA workers show “solidarity” with their GM colleagues by ratifying the deal. Whereas in previous decades autoworkers and the working class as a whole understood this term to mean the need for unity in the fight for improved conditions, the Unifor bureaucrats have transformed this into its opposite by demanding that workers at FCA and Ford accept the rotten deal rammed down the throats of GM workers with the threat of the closure of the Oshawa plant.

The only viable response is for autoworkers at FCA, GM and Ford to unite with their brothers and sisters in the United States, Mexico and internationally to mount a worker counter-offensive in opposition to all concessions and job cuts.



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