

Fiat-Chrysler workers must demand to see Unifor-FCA sellout deal in full

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Following its last-minute sellout agreement with Fiat-Chrysler (FCA) Monday night, Unifor is resorting to blatantly antidemocratic methods to speedily ram it through before workers have had any time to consider its provisions. Unifor President Jerry Dias and his fellow union bureaucrats are demanding that workers, who will be forced to labour under the contract for four years, vote on Sunday and on the basis of no more than self-serving, union-selected “highlights” of the deal.

The 10,000 workers at FCA’s Canadian operations must decisively reject this attempt to stampede them behind another rotten agreement by voting it down. They must insist on the release of the agreement in full prior to any vote and their right to have at least two weeks to study, discuss and debate its provisions. Rank-and-file committees should be established in the plants to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the Unifor bureaucrats, enable workers to carefully examine the contract’s terms in full, and prepare a genuine counteroffensive against the company-union joint attack on jobs and living standards over the past three decades.

Even the limited information that has come to light demonstrates that the tentative agreement presented by Dias, which was based on the rotten deal concluded with GM, continues the pattern of concessions to boost company profits. And it does so under conditions where the auto giants are making money hand over fist. The Unifor president tacitly acknowledged the pro-corporate character of the agreement himself when he enthused over the involvement in the talks of FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne, whom Dias praised for his “candour.”

The four-year deal contains a miserly 4 percent pay increase, 2 percent in the first and 2 percent in the third year, which will not even keep pace with inflation. The

much-trumpeted sign-on bonus of \$6,000 will be taxable and will do little to sweeten the bitter pill of an ongoing cost of living freeze for the life of the agreement.

New hires will receive virtually nothing. The retention of the 10-year grow-in period and the imposition of a defined-contribution pension scheme have enshrined provisions for a multi-tier workforce. The pension concession, which overturns rights secured by workers in the course of decades of bitter struggle, has been celebrated by the Canadian business elite, which is demanding that defined-benefit schemes be abolished across the board in both the public and private sectors.

Given that the current agreement lasts just four years, there is no guarantee that the 10-year pay increases promised for new hires will ever be met. FCA could demand changes to the pay grid in the 2020 contract, which, should the current deal pass, would be negotiated under conditions of workers being paid many different hourly rates. Unifor is therefore fully complicit in enforcing what will be a permanent reduction of autoworkers’ wages to boost the bottom line of its corporate cronies.

The investment promises Dias claims to have extracted are a fraud and were aptly summed up by a Ford worker who described them to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* as “preventive maintenance.” The \$325 million earmarked for an upgrade to the Brampton plant’s paint shop contains no guarantees of a new model for the facility and Unifor has acknowledged that 150 to 200 jobs will be eliminated at the Etobicoke casting plant.

In line with Unifor’s reactionary nationalist program, Dias is encouraging workers to place their faith in the big-business federal and Ontario Liberal governments

to help secure longer-term investment by FCA. In an interview with the financial news service BNN this week, he claimed that the Liberals are much more concerned with workers' jobs and the auto industry than their Conservative predecessors.

It should not be necessary to remind autoworkers what happened the last time the unions appealed to the Liberals for support. During the auto bailout in 2009, the provincial Liberal government collaborated closely with Harper's Conservatives and the Obama administration in the US to provide billions in public funds to the Detroit Three, while workers on both sides of the border were forced to accept devastating cuts to wages, benefits and pensions as a condition for the "bailout." The givebacks imposed on Canadian autoworkers amounted to \$19 per worker per hour.

In preventing a similar outcome, everything depends on the initiative of rank-and-file workers at FCA and their colleagues at Ford and GM. The demand to see the proposed contract in full is a first step in this counteroffensive. It is an elementary democratic principle that workers should know what they are voting on and what its impact will be on them and their families.

The experience at GM proved once again that nothing said by Unifor can be trusted. Dias and his supporters blackmailed GM workers into ratifying another rotten deal last month by claiming it contained job guarantees based on hundreds of millions of dollars in new investments. Less than 48 hours after the vote, the provincial Liberals revealed that no agreement with GM on new investments had been finalized and that additional talks on government support would be required.

There are doubtless similar surprises contained within the FCA deal. For example, Dias has made no mention of the issue of the use of temporary workers, which the company was reportedly pushing to expand during the talks. Nor has he ever explained precisely what it was about the "candour" of Marchionne, who is notorious for his demands for the imposition of low-wage labour and recently received a \$72 million bonus, that was so important in clinching Monday's tentative agreement.

Unifor's antidemocratic efforts to ram through the FCA contract demonstrate the anti-working class character of this organization. Composed of privileged bureaucrats who speak on behalf of a well-off middle-

class layer, Unifor has emerged like all other trade unions over the past three decades as an appendage of corporate management and the capitalist state. Its principal task is to impose attacks on the workers it claims to represent.

A "No" vote on the current concessions-laden deal can only be the beginning. The workers' committees must also appeal for solidarity from their colleagues at Ford and GM, who have been systematically isolated and played off against each other by the union bureaucracy. Breaking from this straitjacket requires the fight for an industry-wide strike to beat back all concessions and job cuts.

Above all, workers must repudiate the nationalist pro-capitalist politics advocated over decades by the union bureaucracy and which has ensnared autoworkers in Canada and the US in a race to the bottom, with Unifor and the United Auto Workers (UAW) competing to see who can offer up their members to be exploited for the lowest price. A joint struggle by autoworkers across Canada in alliance with their brothers and sisters in the US and internationally is the only way that the givebacks imposed by the unions can be overturned and decent-paying jobs secured.



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