Vote “No” on FCA-Unifor sellout deal

Build rank-and-file committees to resist company-union concessions

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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges all Fiat-Chrysler workers to vote down the miserable concessions contract Unifor will present for ratification this Sunday and to form rank-and-file factory committees to mobilize autoworkers north and south of the border against the union-backed attack on wages, jobs and pensions.

Unifor President Jerry Dias and his fellow bureaucrats are resorting to blatantly anti-democratic measures to speedily ram through the deal they announced last Monday night. Workers are not even being allowed to see the full agreement. Instead they are being provided with self-serving union-selected “highlights.”

Even the limited information that has come to light demonstrates that the 4-year tentative agreement continues the now decades-long practice of sacrificing rights won in decades of bitter struggle so as to boost company profits. And this under conditions where the Detroit Three are making money hand over fist.

*After a decade without a wage increase, longer-term workers will receive miserly pay increases of just 4 percent—2 percent in the first year and 2 percent in the fourth year. COLA will remain frozen until June 2020. As a result, workers’ real wages will continue to decline.

As for the $6000 signing bonus, it is a bribe, much of which will be taxed away, aimed at exploiting workers’ need for ready cash.

*The proposed contract further entrenches the hated two-tier system, under which new hires must labour for a decade before reaching full wages. Unifor is claiming to have established a new grid calling for enhanced increases as workers progress toward the top-tier. But there is nothing to prevent the auto bosses from stripping away these small incremental increases in 2020.

*In a major concession, Unifor has agreed to the imposition of a defined-contribution pension scheme on new hires. This means there will now be a three-tier workforce, with workers divided between defined-benefit, hybrid, and defined-contribution pension schemes.

Big business can barely contain its delight at Unifor’s capitulation to the auto bosses’ push for a defined-contribution pension plan that shifts all risk onto workers’ backs. The business press is full of commentary arguing that the elimination of defined-benefit pensions at GM and Fiat-Chrysler opens the door to their across-the-board elimination in both the private and public sectors.

*As for retirees, as one worker put it, they have “been thrown under the bus again,” with only those who retired decades ago receiving any increase.

Autoworkers should place not a shred of confidence in what Dias or any of his fellow Unifor bureaucrats say, especially about securing investment guarantees. Concession-contract after concession-contract has been promoted by Unifor as a “jobs saving agreement.” But since 2000 the number of workers at the Detroit Three in Canada has been nearly halved.

At GM, the union touted the new agreement with the claim that it has saved the Oshawa assembly plant. But less than 48 hours after Unifor succeeded in getting it ratified, and in the face of unprecedented rank-and-file opposition, the Ontario Liberal government revealed that nothing has been finalized and that GM’s new investments are conditional on its securing massive handouts from the Ontario and federal governments.

The investment promises Unifor claims to have secured from FCA are likewise a sham, aimed at blackmailing workers into accepting a concessionary deal under the threat of job losses. In reality, no commitment was obtained from FCA to provide a new product for Brampton assembly and the union has agreed to the elimination of up to 200 jobs at the Etobicoke Casting plant.

Unifor’s “strategy” consists of convincing Detroit Three investors that it can ensure them handsome profits by presiding over a workforce that in real terms is making only a fraction of what autoworkers were making ten years ago,

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and by helping them obtain hundreds of millions of dollars in government handouts, paid for through cuts to public services.

Unifor's alliance with the auto bosses goes hand-in-hand with its support for the big business federal and Ontario Liberal governments. Dias is urging workers to place their hopes in Liberal promises of government support for the auto industry. But the Liberals' interest is not in securing workers' futures, but in boosting the profits of Canadian big business and asserting its predatory global interests by joining US-led wars overseas.

The Liberals played a major role in designing and imposing the auto "bailout" in which $14 billion was given to the auto bosses on condition workers' wages and benefits were slashed by $19 per hour. And they would not hesitate to force through similar attacks in the future, especially given the fact that none of the underlying causes of the capitalist crisis have been resolved and there are increasing signs of an new crash.

Unifor combines bankrupt appeals to the Liberals with a reactionary nationalist policy, which pits Canadian workers against their brothers and sisters in the US and internationally. Dias' entire strategy has been premised on the claim that Canadian autoworkers must remain "competitive" to attract investment from the corporate elite. It has been on the basis of such a nationalist, pro-capitalist outlook that Unifor and its predecessor the Canadian Auto Workers, like the UAW in the US, have pitted workers against each other in a race to the bottom.

The true allies of FCA Canada workers are not the union bureaucrats on six-figure salaries and the federal and provincial Liberal governments, but autoworkers in the US and internationally.

A "No" vote by FCA workers would be met with a powerful response by US autoworkers. Last year, workers at FCA initiated a rebellion against the UAW's efforts to further entrench the two-tier system and the concessions imposed during the 2008-9 "bailout.`" Their overwhelming "No" vote, the first in over two decades on a union-approved deal, galvanized opposition among workers at GM and Ford. The union only managed to force through concessions contracts because it resorted to intimidation, anti-democratic methods, and outright ballot-fraud.

Unifor's antidemocratic efforts to ram through the FCA contract, without even allowing workers to see the full agreement, demonstrate the anti-working class character of this organization. Composed of privileged bureaucrats, Unifor, like unions all over the world has been transformed over the past three decades into an appendage of corporate management and the capitalist state. Its principal task is to impose attacks on the workers it claims to represent.

If the latest miserable concessions deal is to be defeated, everything depends on the independent initiative of FCA workers. A decisive "No" vote must be combined with the formation of rank-and-file committees, led by the most trusted and militant workers, to organize a counter-offensive. These committees should insist that workers be given at least two weeks to study and debate any proposed agreement with FCA.

They should also make an immediate appeal to autoworkers at GM and Ford, who are involved in a similar battle to defend their working conditions, to join FCA workers in an industry-wide strike to overturn all concessions and win substantial gains for the workforce. The *Autoworkers Newsletter* urges workers to demand a 30 percent pay increase, the abolition of the two-tier wage system, the reintroduction of defined benefit pensions for all and the restoration of all cost of living adjustments.

Achieving such basic social rights to which autoworkers are entitled requires an international offensive by autoworkers against corporate management and their stooges in the unions. FCA workers must appeal directly to their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and internationally to reject the nationalism peddled by the union bureaucracy and join their struggle to win decent-paying, secure jobs for all in opposition to the incessant drive for corporate profits by the auto giants and capitalist governments.

This is above all a political fight, requiring the adoption of a new perspective based on a socialist and internationalist program and the fight for a workers' government. In this struggle, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* offers FCA workers and autoworkers throughout the industry in North America its closest collaboration.

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