

Unifor rams through another sellout deal at Fiat-Chrysler

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Unifor announced late Sunday evening that the tentative agreement it had placed before the union's 9,600 members at Fiat-Chrysler (FCA) had passed with an overall majority of 70 percent. FCA production workers voted 69 percent in favour of the four-year deal, while skilled trades ratified it by a margin of 74 percent.

The vote, for an agreement Unifor touted as the best in years, indicated mounting opposition not just to the terms of the proposed contract, but to the corporatist, pro-company Unifor—Canada's largest private sector union. Last month, workers at General Motors Canada approved a similar concessionary agreement by 64 percent, the narrowest margin ever for a union-supported agreement at one of the Canadian subsidiaries of the Detroit Three.

At the ratification meetings in Windsor and Brampton, Ontario, supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* distributed more than 1,000 statements urging workers to reject the concessionary contract, form rank-and-file committees to take the struggle out of the hands of Unifor, and appeal to workers in the US and Mexico to join them in a common struggle against the auto bosses.

Unifor President Jerry Dias will now seek to impose the same sellout “pattern contract” on 7,000 workers at Ford Canada. If the union has chosen to negotiate with Ford last, it is because it is aware that there is an especially militant mood among workers at Ford's giant Oakville assembly complex. Fearful of the brewing rebellion amongst Oakville workers against a “pattern” settlement that will result in yet another cut in workers' real wages and further entrenches the hated two-tier system, the Unifor Local 707 leadership has been forced to declare that it will oppose bringing it before the membership without “significant improvements.” Dias, in a move that indicates the mounting tensions within the union apparatus, has denounced the Local 707 leadership as the “hateful eight,” although in the past they have been his

loyal lieutenants, including in pushing through a lengthening of the two-tier “grow-in” period from six to 10 years.

Over the past year, Unifor has insisted that maintaining the current auto manufacturing “footprint” in Canada was its overriding goal. Adopting the language and methods of the auto bosses, the Unifor officialdom has threatened workers with job losses and whip-sawed one plant against another to argue that workers must accept another concessionary contract under conditions where the Detroit Three are making money hand over fist.

To secure ratification at both GM and Fiat-Chrysler, the union resorted to blatantly undemocratic methods, providing the workers with only union-selected “highlights” of the proposed agreements and demanding they immediately vote on it.

Even the known “highlights” were dishonestly packaged in the handout Unifor gave out at the ratification meetings. The derisory 4 percent wage increase over four years (actually a wage cut when inflation is factored in)—2 percent in year one, then two years of no raises whatsoever, followed by another miserly 2 percent in the fourth year—was presented in the union brochure pay grid as raises of \$1,414 per year, so as to make it appear that increases had been negotiated for each year of the deal.

Unifor's claims to have won new investment from FCA “commitments” are a fraud. There is no long-term commitment to the Brampton facility, and the agreement will see the workforce at the Etobicoke Casting Plant nearly cut in half. FCA did say it will consider a new product for the Brampton assembly plant on “an existing platform or entirely new vehicle,” but this is “subject to” ongoing discussions with the Ontario and federal governments on FCA receiving hundreds of millions in government grants. Moreover, the fate of long-term production both in Brampton and Etobicoke Casting are “subject to market demand, consumer preferences,

company business plan requirements, favorable economic conditions and Group Executive council approval”.

Workers at General Motors will recognize this double-talk. Days after they narrowly approved their September deal, the Ontario government revealed that financial arrangements for the GM investments in Oshawa and St. Catharines that Unifor claimed to have “won” have, in fact, not been finalized.

The rest of the deal further demonstrates that the “pattern” continues the now decades-long practice of sacrificing rights won in decades of bitter struggle so as to boost company profits.

The hated two-tier system remains in place. And in a major concession trumpeted by the Bay Street financial houses, 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.

At Sunday’s meetings, Dias, steeped in arrogance, told the *Detroit Free Press* that the FCA deal would pass, even before the votes were counted. Dias and FCA Master Bargaining Committee Chair Dino Chiodo did not even deign it necessary to stay to answer all the questions from the floor in Windsor. And later that day at the Brampton local ratification vote, Dias once again bowed out early from the question-and-answer session.

Concerned about rank-and-file opposition, some 40 Unifor bureaucrats sought to prevent supporters of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* from speaking to workers outside the Windsor meeting. They provocatively surrounded those distributing the newsletter while shouting, “Commies,” “They’re Americans,” “They’re Trump supporters,” in an effort to prevent workers from taking the newsletter. One Local 444 bureaucrat claimed there were no concessions contained in the contract and said giving up defined benefit pensions was not a big deal because it would only affect those who had not been hired yet. He boasted that the two-tier wage system had boosted corporate profits and said it was good that FCA boss Sergio Marchionne has reaped tens of millions in bonuses.

Hundreds of workers took the *Newsletter* despite the efforts of Unifor Local 444 officials to intimidate them. Several workers said they knew the *Newsletter* and had circulated it in the plant because it was the only source of true information about their struggle.

WSWS supporters also circulated hundreds of leaflets at the Brampton ratification meeting before Unifor officials sent a platoon of security guards out to prevent workers

from taking them.

Many workers expressed their opposition to the contract and said they would reject it. A veteran Chrysler worker said he was outraged over the insulting pay raise in the contract. “Four percent over four years will not even cover the increased cost of milk and bread. We haven’t had a raise in a decade.” Pointing to the young worker he was attending the meeting with, he added, “And for the younger generation they’ve taken away their pensions. I’m voting this down.”

Several workers expressed anger over the fact that they were given nothing but “highlights” to vote on. “At the plant I came from,” a younger new hire said, “at least we got the whole contract to look at.” Even as Unifor bureaucrats were promoting nationalism, the young worker expressed agreement with the fight to unite Canadian and US workers. “They want us fighting each other,” he said, adding that he is also concerned about the growing danger of war.

Reflecting the totally anti-democratic outlook of Unifor, one official declared, “Who are you to come and talk to ‘our’ workers? It should be against the law to interfere in our process. This isn’t a democracy. You ought to go to jail.” In Windsor, workers engaged in a long and heated discussion with one Unifor official, insisting that they agreed with the position of the *Newsletter* that workers had the right to see the full contract.

A veteran worker from Brampton told the WSWS, “I am dissatisfied. In fact there are a lot of people unhappy with it. 40 percent of those at our plant are within two years of retirement. There is nothing in there for the retirees. After that it will be a majority of tier-two workers. They are going to have to stand up for the company to fight for all the things that are being given up now. I don’t like to give up things, because once they are gone, you don’t get them back. We are being held corporate hostages. Our plant is a money making machine. All the equipment is paid for. They are not really putting in anything. But what are we getting?”

Asked his opinion of Unifor, he said, “I call them a corporate union. They keep saying that you need to change with the times, but you can change without selling your soul.”



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