

Unifor announces sell-out agreement with Ford Canada

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Unifor announced it had reached a tentative agreement with Ford Canada Tuesday morning shortly after midnight, averting its first strike against one of the Detroit Three automakers since 1996.

As the union's midnight strike deadline came and passed, Unifor repeatedly tweeted instructions to the 6,500 workers at the company's three Canadian plants not to walk off the job pending instructions from the union.

Soon after, Unifor president Jerry Dias and key members of the union bargaining team, including representatives from Local 200 in Windsor and Local 707 in Oakville, told a press conference that the union had won an "historic victory," but provided next to no details.

Even in comparison with the self-serving press conferences Unifor held to unveil the rotten concessions deals at GM and Fiat-Chrysler, Dias and his fellow union bureaucrats were reticent. They repeatedly refused to answer questions about the deal's contents, claiming they first wanted to consult the membership.

Dias claimed the union had secured \$700 million in "job-saving" investments. These he said would raise the Essex Engine plant from what he called a "C" to an "A" plant in the Ford chain and would position the Oakville Assembly plant to win new products post 2020. But he avoided any discussion of the most vulnerable of the Ford's three Canadian plants, the Windsor engine plant—a tacit admission that it will soon face closure.

When pressed for further information, Dias hid behind the company's need to keep its plans and costs secret from its competitors.

The Unifor president said that the union had successfully resisted Ford's demand for "offsets" to

"compensate" it for what the automaker said were unanticipated increases in the pay of two-tier workers, whose cheap-wages were a key motivating factor in its recent investment in the Oakville Assembly plant. In fact, the proposed 4-year agreement would further entrench the two-tier system under which workers must labor ten years before making the basic wage.

The Unifor leaders felt compelled to repeatedly say that there are "bad things" in the proposed deal and elements of it that they "don't like." They refused to provide any indication as to what these are and indicated that they will not be divulged until the ratification meetings the union has convened for next Sunday. Then, they will be buried—if ever truly laid out—in a union "highlights" brochure.

Dias claimed the new agreement contains something that will please Ford retirees, while again refusing to provide any details. This suggests the company has decided to slightly improve retirement incentives, so that higher paid older workers can be replaced with new-hires, thereby enabling the company to further pad its bottom-line.

The pattern agreement imposed at GM and Fiat-Chrysler is concessions laden. It provides workers who have not had a wage increase in a decade with total wage increases of just 4 percent, which will amount to a cut in real wages due to inflation. The pattern agreement also abolishes any semblance of a defined-benefit pension system for new hires and provides a small increase in benefits only to those who retired three decades ago or earlier.

Unifor rammed these givebacks through in the face of strong opposition at GM and Fiat-Chrysler by claiming that they were necessary to secure investment guarantees for Canadian auto operations. But it soon emerged that most of these investments are dependent

on government aid packages, that is handouts. Dias summed up this strategy at this morning's press conference, commenting, "We are going to need governments to realize the role they have to play" in "consolidating the footprint" of the auto industry in Canada.

Ford workers can place no confidence in the claims made by Dias. Autoworkers should vote down the agreement at next Sunday's ratification votes, demand to be given the full text of any deal, and insist upon at least two weeks to study it and debate its provisions before a vote is held.

In the run-up to Monday's strike deadline, leading Unifor officials did everything in their power to divide Ford workers, lie about the contents of the pattern agreements at GM and FCA, attack those opposing the sellout deal, and pronounce any thought of a strike as futile and counter-productive.

Chris Taylor, president of Windsor Local 200 and the Unifor Master Bargaining Committee Chair for negotiations with Ford, stepped up the union's drumbeat in support of the rotten pattern with an article in his Local's newsletter last week. Referring to the growing opposition to the pattern amongst Oakville workers and a section of his own local, and determined to send a message that the union will not lift a finger in the event workers fail to ratify a deal, Taylor declared, "There are many out there that would like nothing better than to see us fail and end up on strike and believe me when I tell you that at this point that would be an easy solution but we cannot allow the voices and opinions of a few to destroy the future for us all."

With opposition amongst Ford workers still unquelled, Taylor then played the union's "fear card" in a Sunday evening posting to his Local 200 Facebook page in which he bitterly denounced the Local 707 (Oakville) bargaining committee for having suggested the union should try to improve upon the pattern, particularly for two-tier workers. "The implications of demanding more than the pattern agreement have been clearly laid out by Ford," said Taylor. "The company is stating that it will not do business in a jurisdiction where the company is paying more than its competitors. Ford has gone further to say that if there is a strike based on wanting more than the pattern economics it will reconsider their Canadian facilities and exit Canadian operations. This is not something that the

leadership at any level has the right to risk."

In bold type, the statement warned, "Your bargaining committee has made it clear that we will not allow our livelihoods and the future of jobs to be put at risk." Thusly Unifor, squarely in the tradition of Detroit Three companies over the decades, once again nakedly took up the cudgels for management, seeking to whip-saw one plant against another, divide the membership and signal that they will adamantly oppose strike action.

In fact, swallowing concessions contracts hasn't guaranteed jobs. Workers at the GM Oshawa Truck plant can attest to that—the plant was slated for closure only months after a concessions deal supposedly "guaranteed" its life. At Ford St. Thomas, deep concessions combined with investment in a new paint shop did not prevent a wholesale shutdown in 2011.

Taylor's hand-wringing over the prospect of Ford pulling production out of Canada if workers dare to demand anything more than the miserable concessions deal is a profession of bankruptcy on the part of the pro-capitalist union and its nationalist strategy. The company's threat demonstrates that the only way autoworkers in Canada can achieve decent-paying and secure jobs is by breaking out of the collective bargaining framework imposed by Unifor, uniting with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico and the United States, and carrying forward an offensive to defend the basic social rights of all autoworkers

Predictably, the Local 707 leadership quickly abandoned its professed opposition to the pattern agreement. Dias warmly praised Local 707 president Dave Thomas as a "team player" at the press conference announcing the tentative agreement, while a Local 707 representative touted it as "incredible."



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