

After ordering Ford Canada workers to ignore strike deadline, Unifor announces job-cutting agreement

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Unifor ordered the 6,300 workers that it represents at Ford Canada—including those employed at the Oakville assembly plant and two engine plants in Windsor, Ontario—to remain on the job after Monday’s 11:59 p.m. strike deadline to facilitate the conclusion of a tentative agreement with the automaker.

The deal, which Unifor President Jerry Dias announced at a press conference yesterday, sets the stage for further attacks on autoworkers’ wages, working conditions, and jobs.

Talking more like a corporate CEO unveiling a new product line than a workers’ leader reporting back to the rank-and-file, Dias spent the lion’s share of his press conference boasting about the new investments in electric vehicle production Ford Canada is reportedly planning to make.

Dias called it “an historic day,” because the proposed agreement purportedly secured the auto industry’s presence in Canada for “the long term” and would start “a discussion as a nation on how we use our natural resources for the betterment of all Canadians.”

According to the head of Unifor, Ford and the federal Liberal and Ontario Conservative governments will invest CAN \$1.95 billion in the automaker’s Canadian operations. Of this, \$1.8 billion is supposed to go to converting the Oakville Assembly Plant to a facility that, starting in 2025, will be capable of producing five electric vehicle models.

Dias refused under questioning to confirm how much of the investment would be provided by the federal and Ontario governments respectively, but suggested the figure in media reports is erroneous. In a report subsequently confirmed by other news organizations, the *Toronto Star* reported Sunday that the two governments have offered Ford \$500 million in state subsidies.

The Oakville plant, Dias claimed, will also assemble the batteries to be used in the electric vehicles. A 6.8 litre engine was also secured for the company’s Windsor facilities. “We hit a home run,” Dias proclaimed.

The more Dias trumpeted Ford’s investment plans, the more evident it became that this was a ruse to avoid any discussion whatsoever of the essential contents of the proposed contract—be it wage-rates, pensions, work-rules or what, if any, contractual commitments Ford has made in terms of job security and future employment levels.

Even when he was asked directly whether the approximately 4,250 autoworkers at Oakville would have jobs through 2023, when assembly of the Ford Edge SUV and Lincoln Nautilus are scheduled to end, Dias refused to provide an answer. He repeatedly stated that only 3,400 workers are employed at Oakville, suggesting that the union has written off the hundreds of workers laid off at the plant since July 2019.

When taken together with his repeated references that a significant portion of the Oakville workforce is, or will soon be, eligible for retirement, it is clear that Unifor is scheming with Ford to push older, higher-paid workers out of the plant with the *carrot* of an early-retirement scheme and the *stick* of further concessions on work-rules and speed-up. A smaller number of younger workers and new hires—working at vastly inferior pay levels under the discriminatory multi-tier wage regime—would then be employed after the plant’s retooling, ensuring the automaker greatly enhanced profits.

Of the economic package Unifor has agreed to with Ford, Dias would only say that the proposed agreement provides “gains” and “progress” on improving the hated multi-tier wage system. However, the union already made clear in the bargaining updates it sent out during the contract talks that the lengthy “grow-in” period for new

hires, currently 10 years, will remain in place.

Dias was forced to acknowledge that the agreement would result in further job cuts. He claimed that when the Oakville plant is retooled, Unifor will likely have 3,000 members working there. However, given that the fifth electric vehicle model is only scheduled to leave the production line in 2028, it seems likely that the plant will operate at least for several years below even this reduced level. The Unifor president was also conspicuously silent on the fate of the workers employed at the Bramalea Distribution Centre, which is to be closed and replaced by two smaller regional depots.

Unifor is determined to ram through its deal with Ford as quickly as possible and has scheduled a ratification vote for this Sunday. Autoworkers must reject this anti-democratic sham. Unifor is withholding essentially all information about the proposed contract until just before voting begins on Sunday morning, and will, as it has frequently done in the past, give workers no more than a “Highlights” brochure that excludes or downplays major givebacks.

Workers should refuse to vote on Unifor’s “historic” deal until they are provided the contract in full and given at least one week to study and discuss its terms prior to any ratification vote. This is all the more necessary because, due to the pandemic, the meetings will be held online, making it all the more difficult for workers to consult with each other and question Dias and others on the bargaining committees.

At Tuesday’s press conference, Dias did say that the proposed deal with Ford is for three years, meaning that it will expire simultaneously with the agreements negotiated in the United States between the UAW and the Detroit Three. Dias previously stated that his goal in seeking a three-year deal was to enable Unifor to compete more directly with the UAW for investments. However, yesterday he put a twist on this, declaring that Unifor intends to “work hand-in-hand with the UAW” to stop the “migration of investment to Mexico.”

The pledge to “work hand-in-hand” with the UAW, a criminal organization whose top officials have either been convicted or are under investigation for accepting kickbacks from the automakers, must be seen as a threat by workers. Over the past three-and-a-half decades, the unions have used anti-Mexican chauvinism and nationalist appeals to pit workers in North America against each other so as to enforce pay cuts and layoffs.

Dias wants this to continue, as he indicated with his call at yesterday’s press conference for a national-corporatist

strategy to establish Canadian capitalism as a leader in green technology. He appealed for a “discussion” on “how do we use our lithium in Quebec, our nickel in Sudbury, our cobalt in northern Ontario, and our aluminum in Quebec and British Columbia,” because these products, critical for manufacturing batteries, would provide “the foundation for Canadian jobs.”

Autoworkers at Ford and the Detroit Three’s other Canadian operations have no interest in supporting their “own” corporate elite in the global scramble for market share and profits. Instead, autoworkers must unify their struggles with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico, the United States and internationally to launch a counteroffensive in defence of all jobs and the overturning of all concessions.

To conduct such a struggle, autoworkers must immediately form rank-and-file committees in their plants to seize control of the contract struggle and prepare an industry-wide strike to fight for their demands. As the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* stressed in its recent statement, “There is an enormous well of rank-and-file anger against the auto bosses and their Unifor accomplices. But if workers are to prevent Unifor from once again running their struggle into the ground and corralling them into voting on a concessionary contract whose true details they have not been allowed to see, they must act now. They must take matters into their own hands by building a network of rank-and-file committees in all Detroit Three and auto industry plants.”



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