

Vote “No” to Unifor’s sellout Ford Canada contract! Build rank-and-file committees to fight for a North America-wide strike against the Detroit Three!

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges all 5,680 workers at Ford’s Canadian operations to decisively repudiate Unifor’s sellout contract by voting “No” in the ratification vote scheduled for this weekend. A decisive “No” vote must be made the starting point for workers on the shop floor seizing control of the contract battle through the construction of rank-and-file committees in every plant and the preparation of an industry-wide strike across North America to win workers’ just demands.

The nationalist, pro-corporate Unifor bureaucracy has demonstrated by its actions this week that its principal concerns are to block a strike and force through the company’s dictates. In close coordination with its allies in the Trudeau Liberal government and UAW bureaucracy south of the border, Unifor connived to prevent a walkout by Ford workers that would have resulted in the first joint strike by Canadian and American autoworkers in decades. They intend thereby to stop the emergence of a movement that could trigger a broader mobilization of workers against the ruling elite’s policies of austerity and war, and impose the auto bosses’ demand for a transition to electric vehicle production carried out at autoworkers’ expense.

Autoworkers have already begun organizing against the combined betrayals of their struggle by Unifor and the UAW. In the United States, a statement signed by rank-and-file committees at three plants, GM Flint, Warren Truck, and a Dana facility in Toledo, was issued this week calling for an all-out strike. In Canada, social media has been full of workers denouncing Unifor’s treachery. The urgent task is to transform this legitimate anger into a conscious strategy for victory by building independent committees to link up the contract fight in Canada with the strike by autoworkers in the US.

The Unifor bureaucracy’s treachery

The Unifor leadership waited until almost two hours after the contract expiration deadline of 11:59 p.m. Monday to announce an arbitrary extension of the contract by 24 hours. The following evening, with the clock ticking down, the bureaucracy announced it had reached a tentative agreement with “historic” and “transformative gains.” Reports later revealed that the chairman of Unifor’s Ford

Master Bargaining Committee, Local 200 President John D’Agnolo, had not even read the agreement in full before leading the committee in “unanimously” endorsing it.

As if this treachery wasn’t bad enough, Unifor is now ordering workers to review and vote on the tentative agreement while they are effectively gagged and blindfolded. No physical ratification meetings are being organized, because the union apparatus fears that they would give workers the opportunity to talk to each other about the agreement, speak up against the bureaucracy’s treachery, and organize a “no” vote campaign. Instead, there will be one Zoom event Saturday afternoon, allowing bureaucrats who want the contract to pass to control who speaks and block any effort by dissenters to intervene. Workers will have little more than 24 hours to review a “comprehensive summary” of the contract online—that is a self-serving “highlights” package put together by the union bureaucrats so eager to prevent a strike—and just 18.5 hours to cast their vote using an online voting system that will cut out many workers.

The nationalist and pro-corporate roots of the bureaucracy

The Unifor bureaucracy’s conduct is not a matter of mistakes or incompetent leadership. It flows from its nationalist and pro-corporate strategy, which has produced one defeat after another for the past four decades.

Unifor President Lana Payne has repeatedly championed the foul Canadian nationalism that motivated the Canadian Auto Workers’ reactionary split from the UAW in 1985. She chose “charting our own course” as the union’s slogan for the current negotiations, and took every opportunity to insist that Canadian workers have different interests from their American class brothers and sisters.

These lies have been brought forward to sabotage a cross-border struggle by close to 170,000 autoworkers whose contracts with the Detroit Three expired simultaneously for the first time in 24 years. They stand in stark contrast to the sentiments of rank-and-file autoworkers, who whether they work in Oakville, Windsor, Michigan or Ohio have advanced demands for wages that keep pace with inflation, an end to multi-tier wage systems, and job protections

during the EV transition as their key demands against the globally mobile auto giants.

Payne's poisonous nationalism has been invoked by both the Unifor and UAW factions of the bureaucracy since the 1980s to pit Canadian, American, and Mexican autoworkers against each other in a race to the bottom on wages, conditions and jobs. While the original CAW leadership around Bob White claimed to be building a "left" alternative to the "American" UAW, they in fact used the cheaper Canadian dollar and state-funded health care system to offer Ford, GM, and Chrysler (now Stellantis) cheaper labour costs than they could obtain in the US. The UAW bureaucracy was no less relentless in its promotion of American nationalism, with the result that every bargaining round saw the whip-sawing of wages and benefits back and forth across the border as the bureaucracies in Canada and the US sought to grant the automakers the biggest profits.

A similar process is playing out this time. Unifor's conclusion of a tentative agreement with Ford undercut the struggle being waged by US autoworkers and forced Canadian workers to effectively scab on the ongoing strike at three Ford, GM and Stellantis plants in the US. The vague demands raised publicly by Unifor for bargaining were even more limited than the modest proposals put forward by the UAW leadership around President Shawn Fain, who tried to placate militancy among the rank-and-file by adopting a more radical pose than the Unifor top brass.

The fraud of this pose is underscored by the so-called "stand-up strike" Fain is currently leading or rather misleading. Well over a week after the "strike deadline," the UAW has sanctioned job action by just 12 percent of the workforce, while ordering the vast majority of autoworkers to continue pumping out profits for the Big Three. The UAW, no less than Unifor, wanted to prevent a situation in which a strike spread across the Canada-US border, since it would strike a blow against the nationalist divisions they have carefully cultivated over the past 40 years.

The ruling class wants autoworkers to pay for the war and EV transition

The nationalism promoted by Unifor and the UAW over the past four decades has gone hand-in-hand with the bureaucracies' emergence as appendages of the corporations and state. Unifor is a key source of support for Canada's pro-war, pro-austerity Liberal government as it intensifies the imperialist war on Russia and imposes massive real wage cuts on workers through interest rate hikes, wage "restraint" and "post-pandemic" austerity.

Both the Unifor and UAW bureaucracies have worked out in close consultation with their respective governments the terms for a transition to electric vehicle production that will be carried out at the expense of autoworkers—through massive job cuts and plant closures which will be used to blackmail workers into accepting further wage cuts and other concessions. It includes the promotion of "North America First" economic protectionism to secure the lion's share of the rapidly growing global EV market for Canadian and US corporations, and the "on-shoring" of supply chains for critical raw materials.

These reactionary pro-imperialist policies are inseparable from the ruling elite's intensification of the war on Russia and preparations for

further great power conflicts. While the highly profitable automakers are receiving tens of billions of dollars in government subsidies to fund the transition, autoworkers will face precarious employment and the prospect of surviving on inadequate unemployment benefits during lengthy shutdowns. The miserable conditions this will produce have been revealed at GM's CAMI plant in Ingersoll, where workers had to establish a food bank during the plant shutdown to help their colleagues make ends meet.

For a rank-and-file rebellion to organize a North America-wide autoworkers' strike!

Extremely favourable conditions exist for rank-and-file workers at Ford and across the Detroit Three's North American operations to put a stop to the bureaucracy's decades-long treachery. A "No" vote by Ford Canada workers this weekend would be welcomed by autoworkers across Canada and the US as a sign that resistance is developing to the Unifor bureaucracy's sellout strategy. Support for a unified struggle of all autoworkers is growing, as shown by the emergence of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network in the US, which unites rank-and-file committees from several Detroit Three plants.

Over recent months, the largest strike wave in North America in decades has developed, including major strikes by Canadian government workers, West Coast dockers, and US screenwriters and actors. Internationally, mass protests against government austerity to pay for the war and enrichment of the super-rich have emerged in France, while strikes by transportation, public sector, and industrial workers have swept across Europe.

The activation of the vast social power of the working class in support of the autoworkers' struggle depends above all on the initiative of the rank and file. At Ford, a "No" vote Saturday must be combined with the calling of emergency in-person meetings of Local 707 and Local 200 to break through the bureaucratic efforts of the Unifor apparatus to muzzle workers. Resolutions should be passed demanding an all-out strike, including workers at GM and Stellantis, to develop a joint struggle with striking US workers. Independent committees led by trusted rank-and-file workers should be established at every Ford Canada facility. To coordinate a North America-wide struggle, they should affiliate with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The IWA-RFC provides the organizational framework and political leadership needed to mobilize autoworkers as part of an independent political movement of the working class against the the auto giants' relentless drive for corporate profits and to win decent-paying, secure jobs for all.

We encourage all autoworkers who wish to take up this fight to contact us by filling out the form below or by emailing: autorankandfilecanada@gmail.com



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