

Unifor aims to ram through Ford sellout tentative agreement with anti-democratic ratification process

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The Unifor union apparatus is seeking to ram through the sellout tentative agreement it announced Tuesday night with Ford Canada. It is preparing an anti-democratic ratification process this weekend with the aim of shutting out any open expression of opposition and keeping workers from discussing the details of the proposed contract as they learn the contents. Unifor hopes to stampede workers into signing away years of their lives without having a chance to see the full proposed contract or consider the merits with their colleagues.

A letter signed by Windsor Unifor Local 200 president John D'Agnolo and Oakville Unifor Local 707 plant chairperson Marc Brennan was distributed on Wednesday alerting Ford workers that a ratification meeting will be held online via Zoom webinar at 2:30 p.m. Eastern on Saturday and that electronic voting via their email will open at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday and close at 10 a.m. on Sunday. Workers will be able to access a "comprehensive summary" of changes to the contract at 6 a.m., giving them just a few hours to review it before the meeting and less than 20 hours to consider how to vote without access to the full contract.

The decision to hold the ratification meeting on Zoom will allow union bureaucrats who support the contract's ratification to carefully control the meeting by weeding out questions and comments from known militants and silencing dissent. A question and answer

function will only be available to those who attend via the Zoom app, meaning those who call in on their phones will be totally shut out.

While the union claims that the online ratification meeting and electronic voting—instead of in person—is intended to increase member participation, it is likely to cut out a significant share of workers. Unifor Local 200 posted a warning earlier this month that if workers had not provided a current email address they would not be able to vote on the contract.

Workers are responding to the union apparatus's anti-democratic tactics with anger and disgust. A Ford Oakville worker told a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team outside the plant Thursday, "I've been here since '98. What I wanna see out of this contract is higher pay, better benefits and pensions, and the end of tiers. The tiers just aren't fair, and I say that as someone who's at top pay. The eight year grow-in isn't good."

"None of us know anything about the TA, but the union knows if we don't like it, we'll vote it down."

Another added, "I've worked here for 25 years. We've had shit contracts for 16 of them. Nothing changes. The union just keeps giving us bullshit, telling us nothing, and we vote and vote on something none of us really like."

On social media, workers criticized the voting process. "So you have 19.5 hours to decide on the next three years of your career/life, with limited amounts of information..." wrote one worker on Facebook. Another remarked, "In a remarkable show of concern for its membership, Unifor will now let its members sweat it out for 3 days, refusing to release information on the contract until Saturday... hours before we are expected

to vote. Shame.”

Unifor president Lana Payne and D’Agnolo have refused to give any information on the content of the agreement and intend to keep it under wraps until this weekend. In fact it was up to Ford Canada to let slip that the contract’s term is to be for three years.

The Unifor bureaucracy has kept autoworkers in the dark from the opening of so-called negotiations last month through the announcement of a tentative agreement this week. Workers can expect this to continue at Saturday’s online meeting, as any details they provide will be entirely self-serving while they downplay concessions and givebacks.

The secrecy with which Unifor is operating in relation to the rank and file membership, and Payne’s insistence that the union “chart its own course,” keeping auto workers in Canada separated from their US colleagues in the United Auto Workers as they battle the same Detroit Three, are sure signs that a sellout is in the offing.

Autoworkers must take action now to mobilize to defeat the tentative agreement with a powerful “No” vote this weekend. Workers should have discussions with their colleagues on the shop floor and in online forums away from the control of the bureaucracy to decide how their struggle can be taken forward.

A rejection of the sellout contract at Ford must be seen as the first step in a broader mobilization. Workers at Ford, GM and Stellantis must seize control of the contract struggle from the Unifor bureaucracy by building rank-and-file committees in every plant to return the power to workers on the shop floor. They must turn to their fellow autoworkers in the United States, some of whom have been on strike at the Detroit Three for nearly a week, and further south in Mexico, to unify and mobilize a North America-wide struggle against the transnational corporations which have been raking in billions of dollars in profits hand over fist.



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