

“Highlights” of Unifor’s tentative agreement with Ford Canada underscore why workers must vote “No”

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Initial analysis of the “highlights” package Unifor is using to champion the tentative contract it has reached with Ford Canada reveals that the union bureaucracy is seeking to impose a miserable sellout. One all workers must reject.

With just one front-loaded wage increase that is even within the ballpark of what workers want and need and a large taxable signing bonus, Unifor is trying to bribe autoworkers into accepting a three-year agreement that will ensure Ford, GM and Stellantis can carry out their electric vehicle (EV) transition at workers’ expense.

The proposed agreement perpetuates the hated multi-tier wage system, imposes an effective wage freeze over a three-year contract when inflation is taken into account, and provides Ford with the framework to slash jobs wholesale and push the highest-seniority workers into retirement and replace them with lower-paid new hires.

The agreement is not only a sellout for Canadian Ford workers, but also a stab in the back to autoworkers currently on strike or demanding to join the strike in the United States. Over a three-year contract, total wage “increases” will amount to 15 percent. This equates to half of the 40 percent increase over four-years that UAW President Shawn Fain says the union is seeking under immense pressure from the rank and file.

Following the well-worn path of whipsawing wages, benefits, and jobs back and forth across the Canada-US border that has been practiced by the two nationalist factions of the union bureaucracy over the past four decades, Fain will use the “Canadian benchmark,” though he will likely avoid like the plague admitting this publicly, in an effort to ram through a similar sellout for US workers. He has already left Ford out of the “expansion” of the strike announced yesterday, suggesting that a tentative agreement is in the offing.

Within hours of the release of Unifor’s highlights of the tentative agreement with Ford, anger erupted among workers on social media. “Did Unifor even listen to anything that the membership asked for?” wrote one worker. “We should of already been on strike with our brothers down South,” wrote another. “It’s time to be paid our worth. Vote No.”

Top Unifor officials like President Lana Payne and Ford Master Bargaining Committee Chair John D’Agnolo touted the agreement when it was first announced Tuesday as containing “historic” and

“transformative gains.” But they suppressed any actual information about its contents until Saturday morning, prompting an outpouring of anger from rank-and-file workers.

The agreement was the product of the Unifor bureaucracy’s sabotaging of an impending strike by Ford workers across the company’s Canada operations. Although workers had voted overwhelmingly to strike when their contract expired at 11:59 p.m. Monday, they were ordered to remain on the job as the Unifor bureaucracy decided arbitrarily to extend the contract by 24 hours.

It is clear from the highlights package why Payne and her fellow bureaucrats remained silent for days about the agreement’s contents. According to the union, the portion of the workforce currently earning the full rate will receive over the life of the agreement a total of \$30,202 as the result of wage increases of 10 percent in the first year, a pathetic 2 percent in the second and a miserly 3 percent in the third. This is a pittance compared to the automakers’ bumper profits and amounts to a wage freeze when the spiralling cost of living is taken into account. The front-loaded 10 percent wage increase in the first year will have little initial benefit for the 3,400 workers at Ford Oakville, who will be on lay-off for most of this time due to plant retooling and earning just 70 percent of their wage under supplementary unemployment benefits. Only those workers who return after the EV transition will fully benefit from it.

Those returning after the transition at Oakville are not likely to be the most senior workers on the highest pay. The tentative agreement includes 556 retirement packages of \$50,000, to be offered by Ford at individual facilities at times of its own choosing. This figure equates to about 10 percent of Ford Canada’s current workforce of 5,680. In a further indication of how anxious Ford is to force out higher-paid, experienced workers and replace them with new hires who will start at the very bottom of the multi-tier pay grid, some modest pension benefit increases will, it would appear, apply only to workers who retire before October 1, 2023.

It is far from clear how many workers will return to Oakville after retooling. The proposed local agreement negotiated by Local 707 does not specify how many jobs will be offered, with the vague pledge merely included that current workers will be eligible to apply for available positions.

The tentative agreement will, if passed, institutionalize the

widely despised multi-tier wage system for workers hired as part of the EV transition. The wage progression period will be reduced from eight to four years, with a new hire earning just 70 percent of the prevailing rate in their first year. This will ensure that the intolerable situation will continue whereby workers performing the same job on the line earn significantly different wages. Unifor's highlights boast that in year three of the contract, new hires and TPTs will make \$31, which equates to US\$23.

Workers should remember the rule that the larger the signing bonus, the more rotten the tentative agreement is. The \$10,000 bonus being dangled before workers who have suffered the effects of rampant inflation and intermittent production due to parts shortages over recent years is only available to full-time production workers. The temporary part-time workers will receive less than half, with a pre-tax bonus of \$4,000.

The bitter fruit of this tentative agreement is the product of the Unifor bureaucracy's foul nationalism and corporatism, which is on full display throughout the highlights document. It begins by stating, "Canadian autoworkers have a proud history. For nearly 40 years, we've fought for good jobs with high wages, benefits and work standards that reflect the priorities of our members."

As far as the Unifor leadership is concerned, the "history" of struggle by Canadian autoworkers began only in 1985, when Bob White led a reactionary nationalist split from the UAW to found the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). They are determined to efface from workers' memories the traditions of joint struggle established in the 1937 Oshawa strike—which coming just weeks after the Flint, Michigan, sit-down strike opened the door to Canadian autoworkers forging a union—and the 1946 Windsor autoworkers' blockade against Ford.

They also gloss over the fact that far from fighting for "good jobs with high wages, benefits and work standards," the CAW/Unifor bureaucracy has spent the past four decades doing the exact opposite. The very formation of the CAW was based on offering bigger profits to the corporations by exploiting the cheaper Canadian dollar and state-funded health care to grant them cheaper labour costs than in the United States. The result was that every bargaining round produced a competition between the two factions of the union bureaucracy in the US and Canada, and the ruthlessly exploited workers in Mexico, over who could offer up the biggest concessions to pad the auto giants' bottom lines.

While Ford, GM, and Stellantis operated and continue to operate with a global production plan, Unifor and the UAW incessantly work to inject the poison of nationalism into autoworkers to divide them against each other. Over the past four decades, this has produced the introduction of two-tier and multi-tier wage structures, the scrapping of defined-benefit pensions for new hires, and the vast expansion of temporary employment on both sides of the border.

Ford Canada workers must combine a decisive "no" vote today with a rejection of this filthy nationalism. The urgent task is to unify their contract struggle with the 150,000 workers at the Detroit Three's operations in the United States, GM and Stellantis workers in Canada, and autoworkers at the companies' Mexican facilities. To do this, control over the contract struggle must be seized from the bureaucracy through the building of rank-and-file

committees at every plant to place power in the hands of workers on the shop floor.

As the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* declared in a statement entitled "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!" issued yesterday, "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..."

"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 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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