

Why won't Unifor release the Ford Canada vote totals? Workers should challenge Unifor's sham Ford contract ratification process!

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24 September 2023

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In a brief, self-congratulatory statement released around noon Sunday, the Unifor bureaucracy asserted that the 5,600 Ford Canada workers have approved a three-year sellout contract, whose “highlights” had been presented to them little more than 24 hours earlier.

The entire ratification process was an anti-democratic sham. The Unifor bureaucracy suppressed the terms of the proposed contract until just before the vote, prevented workers from meeting in-person to discuss its terms, and only after workers protested the union's refusal to provide any vote totals revealed that just 54 percent of voters backed the agreement. Even now, Unifor is keeping all the other vote totals—including how many workers actually participated in the online vote—secret.

Unifor's initial statement announcing the agreement's purported ratification (Bargaining Update #18) included the ominous declaration, “Priorities met, pattern set.” This amounts to a threat against workers at Stellantis and GM Canada that the Unifor bureaucrats intend to pull-out all their anti-democratic stops to impose like sellout contracts on them.

It should also be taken as a warning by the 150,000 autoworkers in the United States, the vast majority of whom have been kept on the job by UAW President Shawn Fain as he seeks to impose a similar sellout to that orchestrated by his counterparts in the Unifor bureaucracy. Both Unifor and the UAW are fully on board with the automakers' plans to impose the transition to electric vehicle (EV) production at workers' expense. They have refused to fight for genuine job protections even as the automakers, their super-rich investors and industry experts exult at the prospect EV production could involve the destruction of up to 40 percent of auto jobs.

Ford Canada workers and all Unifor members should demand the immediate release of the full results of the ratification vote. At Unifor Local 200 and Local 707, which cover the two engine

plants in Windsor and the Oakville Assembly Plant respectively, rank-and-file workers should convene emergency meetings to order the publication of vote totals for their facilities and a revote on the contract. This should be preceded by a ratification process of at least a week that must include in-person meetings, so workers can question union officials about the contract and discuss its implications among themselves. This process, however, should begin only *after* Unifor has made available to the membership the entire contract online, so they can properly study it.

Unifor's sham ratification process is further proof that the bureaucracy is utterly hostile to the interests of the workers it purports to represent. It underscores the urgent need for autoworkers to build rank-and-file committees to seize control of their contract struggle from the nationalist and pro-corporate union apparatus by placing power in the hands of workers on the shop floor.

Ford Canada workers should combine a struggle to expose every step of Unifor's treachery with a fight to join forces with and mobilize autoworkers across North America. They must help forewarn the Stellantis and GM Canada workers and use the fact that the framework of Unifor's “pattern settlement” is now known to organize to defeat it. Breaking the “pattern” and developing a North America-wide strike will create the conditions for Unifor's betrayal of the Ford Canada workers to be countermanded.

In Unifor's terse initial statement declaring the Ford contract struggle over, no vote totals were included. Only after workers posted dozens of social media messages denouncing the sellout and questioning the fraudulent means used to obtain it, did the bureaucracy feel compelled to post a second bargaining update (#19) in which it claimed that 54 percent of those who participated voted “Yes.” The *World Socialist Web Site* has already heard from one Ford worker who was excluded from the one and only Zoom meeting where the contract was discussed and could not access the online voting system. There is good reason to believe that his experience was not exceptional. It is thus more than likely that the majority of the workforce either voted “No” or were unable to participate in the vote.

Some workers have also alleged that one or more senior Unifor

officials sought to fix the vote by arranging for emails to be sent out to the low-wage temporary workers en masse late on Saturday to encourage them to vote “Yes” by brandishing Ford’s offer of a \$4,000 signing bonus.

The Unifor bureaucracy’s violation of workers’ basic democratic rights during the ratification process is in keeping with its role throughout the past week. After the contract for Ford Canada workers expired at 11:59 p.m. September 18, Unifor waited nearly two hours before announcing an arbitrary 24-hour extension to avert a strike, for which more than 97 percent of workers had voted. When the conclusion of a tentative agreement was made public late on the evening of September 19, Unifor President Lana Payne and her bargaining team members refused to provide even the most basic information about its contents and kept them under wraps until Saturday morning. They organized only one Zoom meeting where the contents of the contract were reviewed, giving the bureaucracy the power to shut down or outright block the participation of dissenting workers.

If the Unifor bureaucrats resorted to such flagrantly anti-democratic methods, it was because they feared workers would rebel against the sellout they had concocted with Ford management and their partners in the Trudeau government.

The three-year contract includes wage “increases” of just 15 percent, which amounts to an effective wage freeze when inflation is taken into account. It also contains retirement packages for more than 10 percent of Ford’s Canadian workforce, which will have the effect of forcing older, higher-paid workers out to be replaced by low-paid new hires. The multi-tier wage system is perpetuated, and no commitments were included on how many of the 3,400 workers at Oakville will have a job after the EV transition.

The pathetic 15 percent wage settlement is a stab in the back to striking workers in the US, who have raised the demand for a 40 percent increase over four years. Fain will now use the “Canadian benchmark” to make huge concessions from this initial demand.

The Unifor leadership’s treachery flows directly from the nationalist and pro-corporate perspective it has pursued with uninterrupted zeal for close to four decades. Beginning with the reactionary split from the UAW in 1985 to form the Canadian Auto Workers, the two factions of the union bureaucracy have systematically promoted foul nationalism on both sides of the Canada-US border to divide autoworkers in the face of a global onslaught by the auto giants. The result has been one round of concessions after another as jobs, wages, and conditions have been whip-sawed back and forth across the border in a race to the bottom.

The Unifor bureaucracy pulled out all the stops to avoid a strike at Ford and ram through a sellout for a number of inter-related reasons. First, it fears the prospect of Canadian and American autoworkers striking at the same time, because this would cut across the carefully cultivated nationalist divisions promoted by the Unifor and UAW bureaucracies over the past four decades.

Second, Unifor is fully integrated through a series of tripartite corporatist structures with the auto bosses and government ministers, who have drawn up detailed plans on how to enforce the EV transition at workers’ expense to ensure that North American companies secure a dominant position in this rapidly growing

global market.

Third, Unifor is a key ally of the pro-war Liberal government. With the support of the union-backed New Democratic Party, the Liberals are dramatically escalating the war on Russia with Canada’s US ally. They could not tolerate the prospect of a North America-wide strike by autoworkers that could have served as a catalyst for mass opposition to the billions being squandered on the war on Russia while workers face austerity and attacks on their living standards.

The Unifor bureaucracy may have “succeeded” in ambushing Ford workers, but only at the cost of what little credibility it retains with the rank and file. Moreover, autoworkers remain in a powerful position to counter the union bureaucracy’s sabotage operation and wage a continent-wide struggle for their demands. Approximately 14,000 autoworkers at GM and Stellantis operations in Canada are still engaged in a contract battle, while well over 100,000 workers in the US are demanding to join the mere 12 percent of UAW members at the Big Three who have been allowed by Fain to take to the picket line.

However, to realize this potential, everything depends on the initiative of the rank and file. A strong basis has been laid by autoworkers in the United States, who have established the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network, which includes independent committees from a series of Big Three and parts plants. Workers in Canada should follow this example by building rank-and-file committees in every plant. They should affiliate with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which provides the organizational framework and political leadership required to unify autoworkers and other sections of the working class in struggle across national borders.

As the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter wrote in a recent statement calling for the unification of autoworkers’ struggles in Canada, the US, and Mexico, “Conditions have never been more favourable for the victory of a rank-and-file rebellion against both the union bureaucracy and the corporations. Explosive confrontations all over the world between workers on one side and the union apparatuses, corporations and capitalist state on the other are reaching a fever pitch. The task before autoworkers in Canada, the United States and Mexico is to make these objective developments the basis of a conscious strategy guided by the independent political mobilization of the working class in a counter-offensive for decent-paying, secure jobs for all and an end to austerity and war.”



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