

Autoworkers express outrage over Unifor's sham ratification at Ford Canada

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Unifor's announcement Sunday that the three-year sellout agreement it concluded last week with Ford Canada has been ratified with 54 percent support has produced an outpouring of anger and disbelief from autoworkers. To prevent Unifor from using this agreement to set the pattern for further sellouts of autoworkers at GM and Stellantis operations in Canada, all autoworkers must challenge the sham ratification process by demanding the publication of the results in full and a revote on the contract so workers can have their say.

"Words cannot express how disgusted I am in my union," wrote one worker on Facebook in response to Unifor's announcement. "Wow just wow," remarked another, "these companies made billions and billions off our backs and this [is] all our union could get us...This was our chance to make amazing gains with both the UAW and Unifor contracts expiring at the same time."

For the first time in over two decades, the contracts for autoworkers at the Detroit Three's operations in Canada and the US expired at the same time, placing workers in a powerful position to wage a united international struggle against the transnational auto makers. However, under the slogan "Charting our own course," Unifor President Lana Payne insists that Canadian workers have separate interests from their class brothers and sisters in the US. This is a continuation of the nationalist rhetoric pumped out by Unifor and its Canadian Auto Workers predecessor

over the past four decades, which has produced one round of concessions after another. Payne's goal in this bargaining round is to poison popular sentiments for a united struggle with autoworkers who are currently on a limited strike south of the border.

Workers were set to walkout on strike September 19 after an overwhelming 98 percent strike authorization. But Unifor waited almost two hours after the 11:59 p.m. contract expiration on September 18 to announce a 24-hour extension to stop the strike. This was followed Tuesday with the announcement by Unifor President Lana Payne of a "substantive" and "historic" agreement with Ford—about which the union refused to reveal any information until just before voting began on Saturday.

"We have no transparency, no exact contract demands (dollar or percentage wise), no idea what Ford countered with, nothing," a senior Ford worker told the WSWs. "Then to top it off the union jammed down our throats this Zoom online contract presentation and online voting. We all disagreed with this process to the union but to no avail. They would not change their mind. This was far from a historical deal! It is a slap in the face to all the retirees and the workers on the shop floor. Only 54 percent approved of this farce of a contract. That should tell you something right there."

The agreement provides for just 15 percent in wage raises over the life of the contract, 10 percent in the first year, then a meager 2 percent and 3 percent in years two and three, and a cost of living adjustment scheme which will leave workers treading water amid a continued surge of inflation in Canada. The deal maintains the hated wage tiers, which means workers will continue to do the same work for less. And approximately 10 percent of the workforce is to be offered retirement buyout offers, which will allow the

companies to shed higher paid workers.

Furthermore, the deal provides no guarantees of job security in the auto industry's transition to electric vehicles, with retooling set to begin at the Oakville facility in suburban Toronto, Ford's only assembly plant in Canada, next year. Workers will be thrown into at least 8 months of layoff with just 70 percent supplementary unemployment benefits and no guarantee that their position will remain when the plant reopens.

The union, which has 5,600 members at Ford and just over 19,000 overall in Canada's auto industry, initially withheld all information about the outcome of the vote, but subsequently released the overall vote share amid an outpouring of worker anger. The bureaucracy is still sitting on information of voter turnout and vote totals by local. Given the slim margin it is likely that a majority of workers voted "no," were cut out by an anti-democratic email voting system or sat out the vote.

Workers were given less than 24 hours to review selective "highlights" provided by Unifor officials who were recommending its passage. They were presented with these details at a single online Zoom meeting before being directed to vote by email. This meant that the bureaucracy could censor any dissident workers, and workers had no opportunity to review and discuss the agreement's terms together.

That Unifor, under these closely controlled conditions, was just barely able to gain a majority in favour is a strong indication of the massive opposition to the deal. Multiple workers have noted this on social media and in discussions with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, with one writing on Facebook, "54 percent in favour is not a win, that is a complete failure. I would love to see how the votes broke down between full and part time workers. Unifor should not be calling anything they did a victory."

Ford workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* reported several instances of workers being unable to vote by email and being excluded from the Zoom meeting.

Further irregularities have been pointed out by workers. Posts on social media appear to show that temporary part time workers were allowed to register to vote over the weekend, despite an announced deadline of September 14. At least one former Ford worker reported that they received a ballot and could vote. A

retiree who was not eligible to vote reported the same experience.

Ford Canada autoworkers who attended the most recent meeting of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network, which brought together Canadian, US and Mexican autoworkers Sunday, called for accountability in reviewing the vote totals and the process.

While Unifor has succeeded, under highly suspect circumstances, in forcing through the sellout at Ford Canada, autoworkers remain in a powerful position to fight back against the bureaucracy's sabotage and wage a continent-wide offensive against the Detroit Three. There are still close to 100,000 autoworkers in the United States who are seeking to join their colleagues in an all-out strike.

The nearly 14,000 workers at GM and Stellantis still engaged in a contract battle must learn from their brothers and sisters at Ford and begin organizing now through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees to reject the "pattern" which the Unifor apparatus, in coordination with management, is seeking to ram down workers' throats.

Everything depends on the initiative of the rank-and-file. Workers in Canada must follow the example of workers in the United States who have formed the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to coordinate the activity of independent committees at Detroit Three assembly and auto parts plants. Workers must affiliate with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which provides the framework and political leadership for the development of a united struggle across national borders. Contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* today for assistance in building a rank-and-file committee in your plant.



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