

Unifor president seeks to steamroll growing opposition to sham Ford Canada ratification

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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter encourages all workers with evidence of irregularities during the ratification to share them anonymously here.

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Unifor President Lana Payne released a statement Tuesday night with the aim of steamrolling growing opposition to the sellout agreement that the union declared ratified last Sunday and the anti-democratic methods it used to secure a narrow 54 percent “Yes” vote.

The three-year agreement—which Unifor now intends to make the “pattern” for similar sellouts at GM Canada and Stellantis—provides a meager 15 percent wage increase over three years, perpetuates the hated multi-tier wage system and provides no job security, under conditions where the automakers intend to use the transition to electric vehicle production to slash jobs wholesale.

Payne’s message was addressed to skilled trades workers at Ford, who have deluged Unifor officials with angry complaints after learning that the union declared the contract ratified in violation of an at least 35-year-old commitment to skilled trade workers at the Detroit Three that no contract would be adopted without their majority support.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* has publicized the skilled trades’ vote against the contract and the union’s breaking of its own ratification rules, and provided a voice to the rank and file, who have been shut out of the negotiating process throughout.

In her letter, Payne desperately sought to justify the union’s arbitrary and anti-democratic actions. But she had to admit—as workers have insisted—to the existence of a 1988 Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) letter which blocks

the ratification of a tentative agreement if it is rejected by skilled trades.

Payne declared that the 1988 letter does not “align” with Ontario’s labour code or the Unifor constitution and will be amended at the next meeting of the National Executive Board. In other words, the union tops have declared it null and void behind the backs of the workers, and will themselves only actually approve this anti-democratic maneuver retroactively.

Responding to the union president’s dismissal of the long-established rights of skilled trades workers, a Ford Oakville worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “Their position is skilled trades don’t matter. They don’t have a voice.”

Union meetings with skilled trades workers in Oakville Monday and another planned for Thursday in Windsor are being held to allow workers to vent steam, but the union leadership has made clear that they will not change anything about the contract.

“Meetings could be heat[ed] but it gives them the opportunity to view their concerns, that’s ok,” John D’Agnolo, the Unifor Local 200 president and chair of its Ford Master Bargaining Committee told AM800 Wednesday. “It’s not the first time we’ve had these types of meetings.”

Underscoring the Unifor top brass’ determination to ignore and suppress all opposition to the “pattern settlement,” D’Agnolo added, “If they have a local issue that might be outstanding that they want us to listen to them about, we will obviously see if we can resolve it with the company and see what we can do for them.”

Payne’s “Message to Unifor Skilled Trades members at Ford Motor Company” leaves no avenue for workers to challenge the ratification of the agreement through union channels. “Collective bargaining with Ford,” she insists, “is complete with new collective agreements in place.”

Payne goes on to argue that “a majority of Unifor

members covered” by the agreement voted in favour of the sellout, and it would be undemocratic if the skilled trades, who comprise a minority within the workforce, were able to block the deal.

This argument is entirely fraudulent.

First, no one outside of the Unifor apparatus knows the vote totals. Only after workers raised a ruckus on social media did the union announce the 54 percent “Yes” vote. But it has refused to release any breakdown of total turnout, how many workers could not vote or abstained, or even a breakdown of the vote by union local. Given the slim figure announced by Unifor, it is certain that a majority of Ford workers did not vote in favour of the “ratified” sellout contract. That is, they either voted “No,” couldn’t vote because of the deliberately cumbersome online voting process, or abstained.

Second, and even more fundamentally, the “Yes” vote was a manipulated result.

Throughout the current bargaining round with Ford, GM and Stellantis, Unifor has sought to sabotage the will of the membership at every turn. With 5,600 Ford autoworkers ready to strike, the union waited for two hours after the contract expired September 18 to announce a 24-hour extension, which was followed some 20 hours later by the announcement of a tentative agreement.

Unifor then kept Ford workers completely in the dark on the details of their sellout until the day of ratification meetings, which were held online via Zoom. Workers were given less than 24 hours to consider self-serving highlights by the bureaucracy before having to vote by email.

Workers have reported severe problems with the voting system, including some former and retired members being given access to vote. And in a clear indication of vote manipulation by the union officials who backed the tentative agreement, temporary part-time (TPT) workers were encouraged to register and vote after the ratification meetings, despite an earlier deadline set by Unifor.

A worker has informed the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that the stepdaughter of Unifor Local 200 President John D’Agnolo sent out an email to more than 40 TPT workers on the day of the vote encouraging them to register, with financial secretary Darby McCloskey dangling the \$4,000 signing bonus as an incentive to vote “Yes.”

“I firmly believe Unifor knew how votes were coming in and found themselves in a 50/50 situation, and not knowing if this ratification was going to pass or not, so they interfered,” the worker told the *WSWS*. “What

happened to the democratic policy Unifor always pledges or does that only apply when it is convenient for them?”

Unifor is now moving quickly to use the sham deal at Ford to set the pattern for an agreement with GM, with the opening of negotiations Tuesday. Significantly, the union has thus far refused to set a strike deadline.

Workers will not be able to countermand the Unifor bureaucracy’s criminality on the basis simply or primarily of a legal or procedural challenge. It is a political question and requires that they take the struggle into their own hands and fight to escalate the class struggle.

In a statement published yesterday, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* called on all Ford Canada workers, production and skilled trades, to fight for emergency meetings of Local 707 and Local 200 in Oakville and Windsor to pass resolutions demanding the removal of the bargaining committee for organizing this anti-democratic farce, the publication of the results in full to reveal Unifor’s skullduggery in its entirety, and the holding of a revote under the supervision of trusted rank-and-file workers. Ford workers should call for support from fellow autoworkers and all of Unifor’s 300,000 members, because they all confront the same anti-democratic bureaucracy.

Autoworkers at the Detroit Three must form rank-and-file committees at every plant in coordination with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), putting power back in the hands of workers on the shop floor and uniting autoworkers in Canada, the US and Mexico in a North America-wide struggle against the auto bosses.



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