

# Unifor orders GM Canada workers to end strike after just 14 hours and without a ratified contract

Keith Jones  
10 October 2023

*Are you a GM worker in Canada? We want to hear from you. Click here to fill out the form at the end of this article to tell us what you're fighting for and discuss joining a rank-and-file committee.*

The Unifor apparatus shut down a strike by 4,300 GM Canada workers Tuesday afternoon, just 14 hours and 30 minutes after it began.

In flagrant violation of the traditional union policy of “no contract, no work,” Unifor instructed workers to report for their regular Tuesday 2:30 p.m. shift, even though they have yet to ratify—or, for that matter, even see—the tentative agreement with GM that the union had announced little more than an hour earlier.

A Unifor bargaining update claims General Motors has accepted “to the letter” the sellout “pattern” agreement that it reached with Ford last month and imposed on workers through a sham ratification process. Just 54 percent of workers who participated in the Ford vote endorsed what Unifor President Lana Payne hailed and continues to hail as an “historic” and “life-changing” agreement.

Despite the Detroit Three automakers making bumper profits and workers having endured decades of concessions and three years of surging inflation, the Ford agreement provides workers a meagre 15 percent wage “increase” spread over three years. When inflation is taken into account, this amounts to an effective wage freeze.

Unifor’s “pattern” agreement with Ford also perpetuates the hated multi-tier wage and benefit regime. It provides no job protection measures under conditions where the Detroit Three intend to use the transition to electric vehicle (EV) production to slash jobs wholesale and intensify worker-exploitation.

Payne and the Unifor top brass are claiming to have stared down an attempt by GM to break the sellout “pattern” agreement. Its bargaining update says GM gave way on “all items” the company had “fought us on such as pensions, retiree income supports and converting full-time temporary

workers into permanent employees over the life of the agreement.”

The reality is the very brief walkout Unifor sanctioned at GM and has now shut down while running roughshod over the principal of “no contract, no work” was the first the union has authorized during a Detroit Three bargaining round since 1996.

In the intervening 27 years, workers have suffered round after round of concessions and tens of thousands of jobs have been lost. That is the “pattern” to which the Ford and now the proposed GM contract adheres.

Given the rapid collapse of GM’s purported attempt to “break” the Ford pattern and the urgency with which Unifor has sought to corral workers back on the job to produce profits for the company, there is every reason to believe the walkout was a stunt from start to finish. That is to say, management and the Unifor top brass had a tacit understanding to wait to finalize the tentative agreement, so Payne and Co. could posture for a few hours as waging a “fight.”

The bureaucracy’s already tattered reputation took another battering due to the thoroughly anti-democratic methods it used to ambush workers at Ford Canada last month. They no doubt hope that by claiming at hastily convened ratification meetings that they “struck” and “won,” they can muster majority support for the sellout “pattern.”

The union is well aware that there is seething opposition within the rank-and-file. In an attempt to contain that anger within the union’s stifling bureaucratic procedures and under the bureaucracy’s control, Dave Cassidy, the president of Local 444, which represents workers at Stellantis’ Windsor operations, has made a phony show of opposing the Ford pattern, and criticizing the undemocratic ratification process.

Throughout the negotiations, Unifor’s biggest fear has been that workers in Canada will forge links with their class brothers and sisters at the Detroit Three’s US operations and

mount a joint, North America-wide struggle against the auto bosses.

Undoubtedly, a major factor in Unifor's decision to force workers back to work prior to ratification was concern that the longer the strike in Canada continued, the greater the opportunities it would create for workers to forge cross-border ties over the heads of the nationalist, pro-company Unifor and UAW bureaucracies.

Significantly, a key element of Unifor's three-year pattern agreement is the "decoupling" of the contract negotiations at the US and Canadian operations of Ford, GM, and Stellantis. This is meant to make it still more difficult for workers to mount a joint struggle.

For decades, the unions on both sides of the border have whipped up nationalism and pitted workers in Canada, the US, and Mexico against each other in a race to the bottom, whose only beneficiaries have been the auto bosses and their servants in the union apparatuses.

In cutting deals with Ford and now GM, as part of its nationalist "charting our own course" strategy, Unifor is deliberately undermining the battle that the 150,000 US Detroit Three workers are waging for new contracts. Fearing a rank-and-file rebellion, the new UAW president, Shawn Fain, struck a more militant pose than Payne in the run up to the almost simultaneous, mid-September expiry of the US and Canadian Detroit Three contracts. He has been desperately back-peddling ever since, and while forced to authorize a strike has limited it to less than one-fifth of the Detroit Three workforce.

Unifor is counting on the desperation of the many temporary part-time workers (TPTs) who have been making poverty wages while working grueling full-time jobs to secure ratification of its tentative agreement with GM.

At a press conference Tuesday afternoon, Payne made much of the fact that TPTs with more than one year in seniority will be raised to the status of year-one two-tier workers. But as workers have angrily pointed out on social media, the company is allowed to continue using TPTs as a sub-tier, low-wage workforce at its Oshawa assembly plant until August of 2026. "That is almost another 3 years of having assembly lines staffed with workers who have no seniority and almost no rights," noted one worker.

Faced with a flurry of such critical comments, Unifor has disabled comments on its Facebook page.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in an article published shortly after the GM walkout began—and the strike against the Detroit Three became, even if only briefly, North America-wide—workers are in a powerful position to mount a joint, cross-border struggle against the auto bosses. But to do so, they must seize control of their contract fight from the Unifor and UAW bureaucrats and place it in the hands of the

rank-and-file on the shop floor where it belongs.

This requires a rebellion by rank-and-file workers against the union bureaucracy, whose main concerns are to retain their extensive corporatist ties with the state and big business, and to smother opposition in the working class to the rising cost of living and the ruling class' drive to make working people pay for its predatory war with Russia.

Already in the US a network of rank-and-file committees fighting for a continent-wide strike has emerged.

GM Canada workers should resolutely oppose Unifor's sellout "pattern" contract and call on their fellow Detroit Three workers in Canada and the US to join them in fighting for real inflation-busting wage and pension increases; the immediate transformation of all multi-tier and TPT jobs into permanent positions at regular pay; and job security for all, with the EV transition used to benefit working people rather than the auto bosses.

To counter Unifor's attempts to manipulate the ratification vote, they should demand the release of the full contract—not just union selected "highlights"—well in advance of any ratification vote. In contrast to the anti-democratic online ratification meeting and email voting at Ford Canada, they should insist on in-person meetings and votes at the Oshawa assembly and St. Catherine's powertrain plants and Woodstock parts distribution centre.

This struggle requires the building of rank-and-file committees to oppose Unifor's maneuvers, and forge links across plants and companies, and with autoworkers in the US, Mexico, and beyond.

We urge all GM workers and autoworkers throughout the industry who oppose Unifor's betrayal and recognize the need for workers to organize independently of the pro-company union apparatus through the building of rank-and-file committees to fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**