

Growing opposition to Unifor's sellout "pattern" at Detroit Three after it scuttles GM Canada strike after just 14 hours

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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.

Opposition is growing among autoworkers in Canada to the sellout "pattern" that Unifor established at Ford and is now seeking to impose on workers at GM Canada and Stellantis.

On Tuesday, Unifor shut down a strike at GM facilities in Oshawa, St. Catherines and Woodstock, Ontario after just 14 hours.

As at Ford, Unifor is refusing to provide workers with the full contract. GM workers will be presented with union-selected highlights at information meetings Saturday, and then have until that evening to vote on the proposed agreement, by email or in-person depending on the location.

Unifor's brief walkout at GM was nothing more than a stunt aimed at boosting the union bureaucracy's badly tattered credibility before a restless, and after years of Unifor double-dealing, suspicious rank and file.

When the contract with GM expired at 11:59 p.m. Monday night, Unifor authorized strike action on the grounds that GM was refusing to meet various elements of the Ford "pattern," including the transfer of some temporary full-time workers to permanent positions and a new payment scheme for retirees.

With the UAW having previously called out some 20,000 of the 150,000 Detroit Three autoworkers in the US and under intense rank-and-file pressure to broaden the strike, the GM Canada walkout provided a golden opportunity to develop a joint North America-wide struggle against the auto bosses.

Autoworkers at Oshawa assemble the highly profitable Chevrolet Silverado and at the St. Catherines propulsion

plant they build engines and transmissions for GM vehicles sold around the world. Any extended strike at GM's operations in Canada would have had a significant impact on the company's international operations, including in the United States.

But before the strike had begun to have any real effect even on GM's Canadian operations, Unifor shut it down, sabotaging the developing fighting unity of autoworkers. A Unifor bargaining update declared GM had met "to the letter" the sellout "pattern" established at Ford.

In violation of the standard practice of "no contract, no work," Unifor ordered workers to take down all picket lines and report for work as of 2:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Workers at GM have expressed skepticism that the light-speed strike was in fact called to pressure management. "I think it was all a scam," a worker at Oshawa Assembly told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* Wednesday. "I think GM already had a contract lined up for us... I think they were just playing games with us."

"Fourteen hours? Are you kidding me?" another worker remarked to the WSWS. "There's no way that the company and the union were supposedly very far apart if they shut it down that quick."

Workers' suspicions that Unifor's brief strike was aimed at pulling the wool over the eyes of the rank and file rather than pressuring management were confirmed by *Automotive News Canada's* David Kennedy, who wrote Wednesday, "While Unifor's bargaining committee must be thanking GM for the opportunity to briefly flex its muscles, when talks shift to Stellantis, leadership may be wishing GM didn't capitulate quite as quickly so the union could have proved on the picket line just how hard it's fought for this year's pattern."

Indeed, the Unifor bureaucracy led by President Lana

Payne has been fighting—but not for the rank and file. Instead, they have been fighting to overcome workers’ expectations for significant wage increases after decades of concessions and the past three years of surging inflation, the elimination of the hated multi-tier wage and benefit regime, and job protection amid the transition of the auto industry to electric vehicle production.

The Unifor “pattern” is in line with the pro-company, concessionary agreements it has negotiated for decades.

Over the three years of the contract, it provides a total wage increase of 15 percent, which will keep workers treading water. It maintains multi-tier wages and provides no job guarantees during the EV transition, which is expected to see 40 percent of current auto industry jobs eliminated. In fact, the St. Catharines propulsion plant is set to transition from manufacturing internal combustion engines to EV motors over a period of 2 to 3 years, with an expected reduction in the workforce from the current 1,100 to 500.

In order to impose its Detroit Three “pattern” the Unifor apparatus has run roughshod over workers’ democratic rights, holding a sham vote at Ford where low-paid temporary part-time workers were encouraged to register and vote after a deadline previously set by the union. After skilled trades workers at Ford rejected the contract, the bureaucracy violated long-standing union policy which would have blocked ratification and announced that the deal was in force. In the end only 54 percent of Ford workers who voted supported the deal and workers at its largest operation in Oakville rejected it outright.

Workers at Windsor Assembly, the largest Stellantis operation in Canada, have already made clear their determination to break the pattern for a better deal. Last week 600 workers turned out for a union meeting on the deal at which they angrily voiced their opposition to it. Windsor Local 444 President and Unifor National Skilled Trades Chair Dave Cassidy has portrayed himself as an opponent of the deal in order to turn workers’ anger back behind the same bureaucracy which is working to sell them out, expressing his concern that “people lose faith” when faced with such naked sabotage.

A long-term worker at the Windsor Stellantis assembly plant described Cassidy’s newfound opposition to the “pattern” as a ruse to keep workers under the control of the Unifor apparatus and boost his own stature within it. “Cassidy,” he told the WSWs, “forgot he was part of the unanimous approval of the tentative agreement (at Ford). He has backtracked only because the membership criticized the Ford deal and vicariously him. He did not

defend the sacred skilled trades vote and sided with a UAW style fold-in of the skilled trades vote with the production workers.”

The Stellantis worker went on to warn that Cassidy “is no change agent. He is Unifor’s biggest defender and believes nothing should change in its structure or transparency.”

Payne and the Unifor top brass are ultimately hoping that the economic desperation of low-paid temporary part-time and temporary full-time workers, who make up a significant share of GM’s workforce, will be enough to get the deal past the finish line at Saturday’s vote. Current temporary workers with one year’s service will be transferred to permanent positions, but the terms of the deal still allow for GM to utilize full-time low-paid temps until late 2026.

GM workers must develop their opposition and mobilize to defeat the pattern sellout through the formation of rank-and-file committees in every plant which can take control of the contract struggle from the corrupt Unifor bureaucracy and place power back in the hands of workers on the shop floor. They must develop contacts with workers at Ford, to develop demands for a revote on the sham contract, and at Stellantis where there is a powerful sentiment for a fight.

The committees in Canada will be able to unite with autoworkers in America who have built rank-and-file committees at the Detroit Three and are fighting for an all-out strike, as well as Mack Trucks workers who walked out across the US on Monday. To defeat the globally organized automakers, workers must forge the closest ties with workers in the US, Mexico and beyond, and repudiate the nationalist-corporatist perspective of the Unifor and UAW apparatuses which for decades have pitted workers against each other in a race to the bottom.

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.



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