

Unifor sanctions phony 7-hour strike by 8,200 Stellantis Canada autoworkers before announcing sellout tentative agreement

Our reporter
30 October 2023

Are you an autoworker at Stellantis or any of the Detroit Three's operations in Canada? Tell us what you think about Unifor's "Hollywood" strike and how workers should respond. Fill out the form at the end of this article.

The strike by 8,240 autoworkers at Stellantis' operations in Canada was over Monday almost before it began. While workers at assembly plants in Windsor and Brampton, and the casting facility in Etobicoke responded enthusiastically to the job action that was launched after their contract expired at 11:59 p.m. Sunday, October 29 without a deal being reached, the Unifor bureaucracy conceived of the walkout from the get-go as a cheap maneuver to give it a false air of militancy.

This is underscored by the fact that no sooner had Unifor and Stellantis officials shaken hands over a tentative agreement less than eight hours later, than the union ordered workers to immediately return to work on their next shift. That is, without the workers even seeing the agreement, let alone voting on it. So much for "no contract, no work," a basic concept of working class solidarity that was until recently considered a core union principle.

The job action at Stellantis was the classic definition of a "Hollywood strike"—a stunt pulled by the union bureaucracy to create the illusion among rank-and-file workers that Unifor President Lana Payne and Local 444 President Dave Cassidy had "fought hard" to secure the same miserable "pattern" agreement the union previously imposed on workers at Ford and GM.

The bureaucracy is painfully aware of the widespread determination among rank-and-file workers to secure inflation-busting pay increases, an end to multi-tier wages, and job protections during the transition to electric vehicle production. They also know that Stellantis workers, especially at the Windsor assembly plant, had voiced strong opposition to the Unifor-Detroit Three "pattern."

By touting the brief "strike" as proof of their supposed militancy, the Unifor bureaucrats hope to bamboozle and

bully workers into accepting a three-year agreement that amounts to a real wage freeze, entrenches multi-tier wages, and offers no guarantees of the number of jobs Stellantis will provide following the EV transition.

The "strike" came approximately 24 hours after the United Auto Workers announced a sellout agreement for some 56,000 Stellantis workers in the United States. The terms of that tentative deal include a meagre 25 percent pay increase over four-and-a-half years and the retention of the two-tier wage system. The announcement brought to an end the UAW's phoney "stand-up strike" against Stellantis, which never saw more than 16,000 workers or approximately one in four on the picket lines.

The sellout of the strike in the United States was clearly a major factor in the Unifor leadership's calling of any job action at all. Throughout the contract talks in Canada, which have taken place simultaneously with those in the United States for the first time in more than two decades, the Unifor and UAW bureaucracies' primary concern has been to prevent American and Canadian autoworkers from joining forces and fighting together. Knowing full well that the sellout of Stellantis' US workers was looming, Unifor President Lana Payne felt able to say Friday of the Sunday 11:59 pm Stellantis Canada strike deadline, "Like it was with [General Motors], this deadline is the deadline."

At General Motors earlier this month, Unifor organized a 12-hour "Hollywood" strike that disrupted just one production shift at GM's plants in Oshawa and St. Catharines. It used this stunt to try to persuade the workforce that it had been engaged in a real fight for the rotten "pattern" agreement, which the bureaucracy succeeded in ramming through in a ratification vote just a few days later.

The same playbook is being followed at Stellantis, almost to the letter. Unifor's "strike" disrupted production at the Brampton Assembly Plant for a few hours at most. At the largest Stellantis facility, the Windsor Assembly Plant with some 4,500 workers, no direct impact on production

whatsoever was felt. The facility is down for retooling until at least November 1 and possibly November 6. Workers could be forgiven for speculating whether Payne and Cassidy set the October 29 deadline in consultation with Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares so that their “strike” would have the least possible impact on the company’s bottom line.

Financial website *Barron’s* summed up the attitude of investors to Unifor’s actions commenting sarcastically of the strike, “blink and you missed it.” The “impact on Stellantis operations in Canada,” *Barron’s* added, “should be, essentially, nothing.”

Unifor felt obliged to remark on the short duration of the job action in its official statement sending workers back on the job. It asserted, less than convincingly, “While brief, our strike action was an important act of solidarity and determination. It demonstrated the strength of our union and provided your bargaining team with the means to achieve a tentative agreement.”

Unifor plans to hold the Stellantis ratification vote this weekend online. In a concession to the anger among workers in Windsor over the union’s sham ratification process at Ford, which included a rigged online ratification meeting where dissenting voices were shut out, Unifor has agreed to hold in-person meetings to discuss the tentative agreement. At Ford, the bureaucracy overrode the vote of skilled trades workers to declare the contract passed in what amounted to a violation of the union’s own rules. Local bureaucrats also encouraged temporary part-time workers to sign up to vote online after the registration deadline had long passed, tempting them with the prospect of a \$4,000 signing bonus if they voted “yes” and the contract passed.

The “pattern” agreement workers will vote on includes a 10 percent wage increase in year one, followed by 2 percent and 3 percent respectively in years two and three. It institutionalizes a new four-year “progression” pay grid, ensuring that the hated multi-tier wage system will continue throughout the EV transition. The brief note ending the strike stated that Unifor had achieved its “Stellantis specific demands,” which included extending Unifor representation to a low-wage battery plant currently under construction in Windsor—another source of dues income for the bloated bureaucracy.

The Unifor bureaucracy’s commitment to enforcing the dictates of the auto bosses flows from its close corporatist collaboration with Detroit Three management, and the federal and provincial governments. Unifor, first under the COVID-profitier Jerry Dias and now Lana Payne, has enthusiastically championed a pro-corporate transition to electric vehicles. This includes campaigning for tens of billions of dollars in subsidies from the Ontario and federal

governments to be funnelled to the highly profitable automakers so as to ensure Canadian capitalism remains a major player in the global auto industry.

Unifor’s corporatism goes hand-in-hand with its virulent Canadian nationalism. For the past four decades Unifor and its Canadian Auto Workers predecessor have imposed round after round of concessions in the name of “saving Canadian jobs.” While the globally mobile automakers operate with international production and restructuring plans, the Unifor/CAW and UAW bureaucracies divide workers along national lines and compete for investments and product placements. This nationalist, pro-capitalist strategy has accelerated a race to the bottom in wages, conditions, and benefits, as workers in Canada, the US, and Mexico have been pitted against each other to see who could offer up the biggest profits to GM, Ford, and Stellantis.

This process will continue with the latest “pattern” agreement unless rank-and-file workers take matters into their own hands. Autoworkers in Windsor, Brampton, and Etobicoke should seize control of the contract struggle by building rank-and-file committees to wage a campaign for a decisive “No” vote this weekend. The rejection of Unifor’s sellout “pattern” must be made the starting point for a broadening of the struggle, including by appealing to autoworkers at the Detroit Three in the US to repudiate the Shawn Fain-led UAW’s efforts to sabotage their contract fight. Only through the unification of autoworkers’ struggles across North America for improved wages and conditions, and a transition to electric vehicle production that safeguards jobs for all, can the predatory drive for corporate profits by the automakers and the constant onslaught on workers enforced by their union accomplices be stopped.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact