

Unifor shuts down Integram Windsor Seating auto parts strike before vote on tentative agreement

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Unifor Local 444 president Dave Cassidy announced late Sunday night that a tentative agreement at the strike-bound Magna Integram Windsor Seating plant in Lakeshore, Ontario, had been reached.

The 900 auto parts workers, who had been on strike since last Wednesday were summarily ordered back to work for Monday and Tuesday without receiving any details of the proposed deal nor given any immediate information on the date for a contract ratification vote. Cassidy will be at pains to schedule a snap ratification vote as soon as possible that will give little or no time for workers to examine and discuss the terms of the proposed contract.

Integram is a holding of the giant multinational parts supplier Magna International. The company provides “just-in-time” seat and component deliveries for the Pacifica minivan at Stellantis’ cornerstone Windsor Assembly Plant.

Magna has steadily recorded huge profits since the global government bailouts of the banks and auto companies in 2009-2010. Net income attributable to Magna International was US\$339 million for the second quarter of 2023. Its just reported third-quarter results jumped to US\$394 million accompanied by a significant bump in shareholder dividend payments.

Despite telling reporters only a few days ago that the union was far away from any negotiated settlement, the growing possibility that the strike would begin to affect

production at the Stellantis plant and four other parts suppliers by Monday morning prompted Cassidy to dispense with any more of his patented bombast and end the Integram strike. The Stellantis operation had been on a retooling shutdown for the past six weeks and was only just beginning to ramp up production.

The launching of the strike was cynically timed by the union for a “sweet spot” period when the Pacifica assembly line would not be immediately impacted and the contract vote for the new deal at the Windsor Assembly Plant had just been rammed through after winding up a “just-for-show” seven-hour “Hollywood” strike. The last thing the pro-company bureaucrats in the union wanted was multiple strikes spreading through the membership.

In the end, Cassidy, who had earlier blustered about fighting Unifor’s national president Lana Payne’s sellout pattern contract, meekly fell into line in promoting the deal. Even then, more than 40 percent of workers voted against the so-called “historic deal.”

Integram workers are demanding a significant wage increase, the end of the hated two-tier wage and benefits system and a redress of management’s onerous work scheduling practices. The majority of the plant’s workers are still working on the inferior second tier. Few qualify for the \$28 per hour top rate. Fully 750 workers are eligible only for the inferior second-tier Defined Contributions pension plan.

Integram workers must prepare themselves for a struggle against both Integram management and their junior partners in the union apparatus. Both genuflect at the altar of Stellantis’ demands to continue feeding their operation with the required materials.

This is not idle speculation. The history of labour

disputes at the extensive auto parts network in Windsor is beyond dispute: Short strikes erupt against low wages and unacceptable working conditions. But they are quickly ended as Detroit Three executives lift their phones on both sides of the Canada-US border to give their marching orders to the union and the parts suppliers. Any job actions are then quickly ended.

In the current dispute, Cassidy has already admitted that “Stellantis is paying very close attention to these talks. They’re calling me every couple of hours asking for updates. Their bosses are talking with the people involved in their supply chain over issues. They’re very engaged with us.”

What exactly this “engagement” entailed is well remembered by veteran workers at Integram who participated in the last strike at the plant in 2016.

Then, Integram workers walked off the job after rejecting a tentative agreement unanimously recommended by Unifor Local 444 officials. At that time, the workers, many of them new hires earning a paltry \$17.33 per hour, opposed a deal that not only cemented the two-tier system but increased their payments into the benefits plan and included a meagre general wage “rise” that barely kept up with inflation.

Visibly angered by the workers’ defiance, the Local 444 leadership went into overdrive to end the strike. In less than 24 hours, the much despised Local 444 President Dino Chiodo announced a new agreement had been reached. He immediately instructed pickets to withdraw so as to allow vital parts shipments for GM’s CAMI plant in Ingersoll to leave the plant, ordered morning shift workers to report for duty, and arranged for a snap re-vote for that same afternoon.

The whole sordid affair is an object lesson in the utter subservience of Unifor to the auto companies. Unions today act not as fighters to improve the living standards of their members but rather as junior partners of management that seek to increase corporate profitability and smother workers’ resistance.

With GM CAMI facing downtime should the plant go for only two shifts without parts and Windsor FCA impacted by the following week, Chiodo sought to blame striking Integram workers—not the miserable contract offer—for disrupting autoworkers’ jobs at GM and Fiat-Chrysler (now Stellantis). “If we are on strike long, we’re not only affecting General Motors but we’re affecting the Windsor Assembly Plant,” he

complained. “And you’re talking about affecting another 6,000 workers here in Windsor and another 3,000 or 3,500 workers at the CAMI facility and that just has detrimental effects for everyone.”

Windsor parts workers at Dakkota, HBPO, Avancez and ZFF can attest to similar maneuvers during past battles at their own plants.

Autoworkers must not be fooled by the well-established joint union-company “playbook” for dividing parts workers from assembly workers and scuttling any resistance to their dictates. Workers must mount a conscious rebellion against the Unifor leadership and repudiate its pro-company perspective. This means building rank-and-file committees independent of the corrupt union bureaucracy, uniting workers across plants and different employers in the auto and auto parts sector, and mobilizing for joint international action with the rising rebellion of US automakers against their own sellout contracts which are now being voted on.



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