

Unifor announces tentative agreement at GM's CAMI plant after indefinitely extending strike deadline

Niles Niemuth
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Unifor announced Wednesday that a tentative agreement had been reached with GM at its CAMI Assembly and Battery Assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, after indefinitely extending a strike deadline which had been set for 10:59 p.m. Tuesday and blocking a walkout by more than 1,300 autoworkers. CAMI workers had approved a strike mandate by 97 percent.

While Unifor Local 88 Plant Chair Mike Van Boekel boasted in a statement that it was a deal the bargaining team could be "proud of," the union is withholding details of the agreement from workers until a ratification meeting which is scheduled for 10 a.m. Sunday, September 22.

GM and Unifor are hoping to rush through the deal without giving workers the chance to develop opposition to the contract, which will determine the course of their lives for the coming years. CAMI workers must demand the immediate release of the full tentative agreement and all side deals and a full week to consider the agreement before any vote.

"I would like to thank General Motors for understanding what our members have been through for the last three years and for working together to come to an agreement that I think will be extremely well-received," Van Boekel told the *London Free Press* Wednesday.

Van Boekel, saying more than he intended, indicated that the agreement was largely in line with the sellout contracts which were forced through by Unifor over significant rank-and-file opposition last year at Ford, GM and Stellantis operations in Canada. "We've seen a pattern amongst the Big Three. Overall I think it was a pretty good contract," Van Boekel said. "We were

able to match that and exceed it in some areas."

Unifor President Lana Payne similarly delivered glowing praise for the agreement without providing any details, "Congratulations to our bargaining committee for their incredible work at the bargaining table. Every member of our team was instrumental in fighting for and winning this tentative agreement on behalf of all Unifor Local 88 members at CAMI."

While CAMI is part of GM's operations in Canada, it has been offset from the Big Three bargaining since it was established as a joint venture with Suzuki in 1989. It has been wholly owned by GM since 2009. The CAMI workforce has been repeatedly whipsawed through retoolings and reorganizations by management in coordination with Unifor, which operates a corporatist partnership with the auto bosses and the provincial and federal governments.

Workers at the plant are determined to gain full-time employment after extended layoffs and tenuous scheduling as the plant was retooled from traditional internal combustion engine assembly to the production of the Chevrolet BrightDrop EV 600 and EV 400 electric delivery vans. Workers reported having to turn to food banks as they survived on meager unemployment payments during the retooling shutdown.

Since the transition to EV production, battery shortages have hampered production, resulting in an extended shutdown from October 2023 until the spring of this year. A 400,000-square-foot Ultium battery cell assembly plant was opened earlier this year to provide more reliable battery deliveries on site for the vans.

Unifor has been one of the most prominent boosters of the EV transition in the auto industry, under the

guise of protecting “Canadian jobs” and establishing Canada as a centre of battery production to counter China, which currently dominates the market. Payne has encouraged the provincial and federal governments to open the floodgates for public subsidies to the auto giants, endorsing billions of dollars in handouts to underwrite operations by Stellantis and Volkswagen.

In contrast to Unifor’s claims, the EV transition in Canada and around the world is being used by the global automakers, supported by their accomplices in the union bureaucracies, to launch a major restructuring of the auto industry at workers’ expense and destroy millions of jobs. As of this month, workers at CAMI are still rotating on a single shift between two weeks on work and two weeks off on layoff, relying on unemployment payments to supplement their income. At the opening of master bargaining Local 88 leadership declared that GM had agreed to bring back a second shift, something which the company has still not confirmed.

“I worked my last scheduled shift on the 6th, my fingers are crossed that it wasn’t my last. If GM is lying about the upcoming two shift news, hundreds of people will be out of a job, including me,” a CAMI worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “I have been at CAMI for seven years and I have not worked a full year, it’s B.S.!”

Responding to the news of a tentative agreement, the worker noted, “I don’t know what is in the agreement, but I cannot vote for a contract that does not guarantee my full-time position. The junior members have been warned for months that cuts were coming. If there is a firm number of jobs with no major cuts I will vote to ratify. But leadership is being quiet. I am just trying to feel positive. I guess we will know when the bag of goodies are presented this weekend.”

There should be no faith in the Unifor bureaucracy, which is withholding details of the tentative agreement until the release of self-serving highlights during a snap vote on Sunday. Payne and her associates ran roughshod over autoworkers’ opposition to contracts in 2023, forcing through a contract at Ford over a rejection by skilled trades. Phony “Hollywood” strikes lasting a few hours were called at GM and Stellantis to allow the union to posture as fighting for workers before it rammed through the pattern set at Ford.

Amidst an ongoing jobs bloodbath in the global auto

industry—with layoffs at the Detroit Three in the US, the planned elimination of thousands of jobs and closure of plants by Volkswagen in Germany and China and by Audi in Belgium—it is certain that Unifor has agreed to continued precarious conditions for CAMI workers and the right of GM to lay off workers at will, shift production, and close the plant outright if they determine it benefits their bottom line.

While Unifor is working overtime to isolate CAMI workers by ramming through a contract that they will know virtually nothing about and have no time to discuss its contents, a “no” vote by workers would send a powerful message that they are ready for a fight for better working conditions and the securing of full-time jobs.

The conditions for such a struggle are favourable due to the upsurge of the class struggle in Canada, the United States, and internationally. Recent days have seen major protests by autoworkers in Belgium against the shuttering of Audi’s Brussels plant, including a mass rally of over 10,000 that drew support from workers in the metal, manufacturing, and transport sectors.

This takes place alongside the ongoing strike by 33,000 Boeing machinists in the US. A powerful appeal to these and other sections of workers across Canada and internationally for a common fight against the bosses and their backers in the government to oppose capitalist austerity and establish workers’ control over key sectors of economic life, would win an enthusiastic response.

CAMI workers should seize this opportunity to unite with other autoworkers in Canada, the United States and internationally to develop a globally coordinated struggle to defend jobs and fight for better conditions through the formation of a rank-and-file committee. The WSWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees will provide every assistance to workers who are ready to take up this struggle. Fill out the form below to find out more, or to tell us about conditions in your plant.



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