

Unifor springs sell-out tentative agreement on Ford Canada workers over two months ahead of contract expiration

Carl Bronski
14 July 2026

Unifor President Lana Payne announced late Saturday evening that the union had reached a tentative agreement for a new three-year contract with Ford Canada more than two months before the union's current contracts expire with Ford and with the two other Detroit Three automakers—GM and Stellantis.

The sudden announcement included no information about the contents of the agreement apart from its three-year duration, and none has been divulged in the three days since. The Unifor bureaucracy even abandoned its standard practice of holding a post-agreement press conference.

Ratification meetings are now being convened for the July 17-19 weekend. The union apparatus intends to corral Ford workers into the ballot booths to vote “Yes” to the tentative agreement literally minutes after giving them an entirely self-serving and deceptive “Highlights” summary of its terms.

Workers should be under no illusion. If the union apparatus feels compelled to use such flagrantly anti-democratic methods, it is because it is attempting to ram through a massive sellout.

Payne herself has conceded the negotiations are taking place under unprecedented conditions of crisis in the auto industry. Yet workers are being told they must make a snap vote without being given the full contract—let alone afforded the time to study it, interrogate union representatives based on real knowledge of its contents, and debate the way forward.

The global auto industry is being reorganized at autoworkers' expense and with the support and complicity of the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade unions. Unifor in Canada, the UAW in the US and the auto unions in Europe are all complicit in job cuts, production speed-up, plant shutdowns, and attacks on worker rights. During the same week that Unifor announced its tentative agreement with Ford, Germany's Volkswagen, where the IG Metall union controls a majority on the automaker's supervisory board, revealed plans to slash up to 100,000 jobs across its global operations and close four sites in Germany.

Corporations are deploying AI, automation and restructuring as instruments of a class war strategy: slashing labor costs and extracting ever greater profits from workers to sustain a crisis-ridden financial system, while governments divert social wealth to rearmament and war.

This underscores that what autoworkers face is not a “normal” collective bargaining struggle—but a social and political one.

The proposed deal was endorsed unanimously by the union's Ford Master Bargaining Committee. If approved by workers in the shotgun ratification votes later this week, the tentative contract will cover 5,100 workers at the company's idled auto assembly operation in Oakville, Ontario and its two engine plants in Windsor. It also covers workers at three small parts distribution centres.

The fact that Unifor chose Ford as its target company, meaning the agreement sets the bar for further contracts for over 10,000 workers at Stellantis and GM, underscored that the bureaucracy is determined to work out another sweeping round of attacks with the auto bosses. Canada's entire auto industry is in a deep crisis, one sharply exacerbated by the trade war launched by Trump last year and escalated by corporate Canada's nationalist retaliatory tariffs.

That being said, workers at Ford are arguably in the worst position across the Detroit Three's Canadian operations. The main plant at Oakville, which accounts for about 3,000 of the 5,100 workers employed by Ford Canada, has been on layoff for over two years, and the two engine plants in Windsor are heavily dependent on US exports that could dry up should Trump intensify his “America First” trade war.

Clearly, Unifor is counting on the vulnerable position and financial hardships facing the Ford Canada workers to overcome rank-and-file opposition to further givebacks.

Workers must vote a resounding “No” at the ratification meetings and demand ample time to study the deal and discuss it amongst themselves.

But if workers are to reverse the decades-long course of concessions and layoffs, a “No” vote can only be the beginning of the fight. Only through a rebellion against the union bureaucracy in order to place power in the hands of workers on the shop floor can autoworkers wage a genuine struggle for their demands. This struggle necessitates the building of rank-and-file committees at every plant, and the unification of Canadian autoworkers with their class brothers and sisters in the US and Mexico in a joint struggle against the profit-hungry, internationally mobile auto giants.

John D'Agnolo, Ford Master Bargaining chairman for the union who also presides over the Windsor engine plant autoworkers' local already signalled the intent of the union's bargaining strategy last month. Attempting to prepare the membership for yet another round of concession contracts, he ominously told the *Windsor*

Star that workers mustn't expect too much if they are to secure corporate investment and product placements. "You can negotiate all the bells and whistles, but if you're not at work, you don't get any of it," he asserted.

For D'Agnolo and the rest of the Unifor bureaucracy, the so-called "bells and whistles" to be sacrificed mean basic worker demands for an end to the two-tier system, recovery of ever-dwindling benefits packages, a restoration of a defined pensions program, a wage increase that exceeds the inflationary erosion of pay and an end to onerous shift scheduling, speed-up and mandatory overtime provisions.

D'Agnolo's statement came shortly after the union announced that it planned to open early negotiations with Ford to set the industry pattern because Unifor has had a "longstanding and productive working relationship with the Ford Motor Company." That "productive relationship" has produced a long series of concessions contracts. Indeed, soon after the last contract was settled in late 2023—also with the pattern set by Ford—some 3,200 workers at the company's giant assembly plant in Oakville, Ontario were laid off. They have yet to return to work. During the 2023 contract ratification process, thousands of workers were told to expect only an eight-month shutdown for a now scuttled electric vehicle retooling. That deal only passed by a narrow 54 percent vote, with a majority rejection in Oakville and an outright rejection by skilled trades across Ford's entire Canadian operation.

Unifor is counting on the desperation of thousands of Oakville autoworkers, now laid off for almost three years, to reluctantly accept the new deal. They will dangle the latest undertaking from the company to begin production of a Super Duty pickup truck after Ford was promised a \$465 million handout from the federal government that will, in about five more months, "possibly" restore jobs ... but only for 1,800 workers.

Over the past four decades, Unifor has trampled on all the militant traditions of earlier generations of autoworkers and evolved into little more than a cheap-labour contractor for the Detroit Three. Ever since the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Unifor's predecessor, split from the UAW on a thoroughly nationalist basis in 1985, the unions on both sides of the Canada-US border have systematically pitted workers against each other, whip-sawing jobs and conditions back and forth across the border, in the name of defending "Canadian" and American jobs." As the globally mobile automakers have launched a sustained onslaught on the working class, transforming what was once one of the best-paying and secure industrial jobs into a precarious, multi-tier low-wage industry, Unifor and the UAW have offered their services as corporatist "partners" to the relevant executives and national governments, while whipping up poisonous Canada and American nationalism.

Thus the UAW is a champion of Trump's "America First" trade war, while Unifor cheers for a "Team Canada" based on the supposed common interests of workers and the corporate executives and capitalist oligarchs who profit from their exploitation.

Payne's proposed contract with Ford Canada will not be the first time that Unifor (or its CAW predecessor) has concluded contract talks ahead of schedule under conditions where the auto

companies, with union collusion, wield the club of unemployment to impose significant concessions.

During the 2008-9 financial crisis, the CAW under President Buzz Hargrove worked hand-in-glove with the big business federal and Ontario governments to restore the profitability of the automakers at workers' expense. They re-opened the auto contracts with GM and Chrysler to impose draconian concessions, including multi-tier employment. Later in "fairness," the union ceded the same concessions to Ford, although it was not teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, to ensure it remained "competitive."

Echoing the corporatist "partnership" claims currently deployed by Unifor in their "working relationship" with the Ford auto bosses, Hargrove then bragged, "It's a win-win. I never thought like that before. I always thought of just winning for the membership."

The critical lesson to be drawn from this entire experience is the urgent necessity to take the struggle for workers' rights and livelihoods out of the hands of the nationalist, pro-company union bureaucracies.

Already, the struggle to build rank-and-file committees among autoworkers has taken root in auto plants in the United States, with committees rallying workers at Nexteer and other auto parts companies to defeat UAW sellout agreements.

This movement is exemplified in the campaign of Will Lehman for the presidency of the United Auto Workers in the membership vote to be held later this year. A rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker from Pennsylvania, Lehman is running in the UAW on a socialist program to abolish the union bureaucracy and place power back in the hands of workers on the shop floor.

Lehman opposes the nationalist-protectionist policies of both the UAW and Unifor, which divide workers, for the benefit of the auto bosses, and corral them behind their "own" governments in trade war and the developing global war.

Lehman is a leading representative of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which exists to coordinate workers' struggles around the world in opposition to the globally organized auto corporations. The IWA-RFC fights to unify autoworkers in Canada with their fellow workers in the US, Mexico and internationally, alongside all workers entering into struggle amid the skyrocketing cost of living due to the criminal US/Israeli war on Iran. This organizational form expresses the reality of the class struggle today, which unfolds across national borders and cannot develop outside of a frontal assault on the dictatorial power exercised over society by the financial oligarchy, opposition to imperialist war, and the fight for the reorganization of social and economic life to meet the needs of the vast majority, not provide greater profits for the few.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact