

## UAW, CAW Solidarity

In the spring of 2008, the Canadian Auto Workers' union, the CAW, opened contract talks early to negotiate a concessionary contract in order to give the Detroit 3 auto makers a cost savings advantage they claimed they needed as the economy slide downwards, and also to avoid reopening the contract before its September 2011 expiry date.

Anger amongst the workers spread like wild fire throughout the auto sector in Ontario, but of course every single plant was threatened with plant closure if concessions were not met. At the Ford plant in Oakville, the Oakville Assembly Complex, workers were only two years into the newly structure flex plant manufacturing system and were building the Ford Edge, MKX, and Flex. Even with the constant threat of their jobs going to Chicago, the workers felt they had been making concessions and opening agreements too many times. Their rank and file, CAW Local 707, rejected the concessions by nearly 60% and made history by rejecting the leadership's recommendation for the first time in CAW history.

Unfortunately, the concessions were accepted by the three other Ford plants and the attempt to turn the direction of the union around failed. The Ford unit of the CAW is due to return to the bargaining table at any moment. Scared of another rejection vote the leadership of the CAW has been working diligently to convince members to accept more concessions. While Joe Hinrichs, Ford Group Vice President of Global Manufacturing and Labour Affairs tours the UAW to sell concessions to the Ford unit, it is CAW's National President who is spearheading the campaign to take more concessions in Canada.

To add to the growing resistance within the CAW, GM's CAMI, CAW Local 88, in Ingersoll ratified September 20 and only received a 60% in favour of concessions. More evidence the rank and file are not happy with the direction their leadership has taken them.

For the Ford workers in Canada, they have been traditionally pitted against their American UAW comrades but now they are being told they are competing against Mexico, China and India for jobs. A competition for which workers everywhere will always lose.

With each round of concessions made, the workers have been assisting the companies to help transfer their jobs over to the lower waged workers, whether that's jobs outsourced to new companies or second tiered new hire grow-ins or temporary part time workers, the latter meaning not just low paying jobs but no permanent employment. How much of a controlling share do the Detroit 3 have in these companies?

This is a pivotal moment in North American labour history, the UAW and CAW will only continue competing with each other if these concessions pass. What is needed is for both sides to reject any more concessions and stand united, for themselves and to give the GM/Fiat/Chrysler workers a standard to demand for the next contract.

Since the early 2008 ratifications, rank and file members throughout the auto sector in the CAW have been meeting and building a solidarity which is not sanctioned by their National or Locals' leadership, and with the growing rejection votes it is clearly evident all workers have had enough of giving back.

It is expected that the Ford unit CAW will ratify before the concession fatigued UAW in order to pressure the UAW into further give backs. Therefore it's imperative these concessions are rejected on both sides of the border. To build international solidarity for all workers, we must reunite with each other, and it is only with international solidarity will we conquer the continuous exploitation of ourselves in the workplace.

In Solidarity,  
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