

Auto parts workers launch strike at Integram facility in Windsor, Ontario

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7 November 2016

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* hails the vote by 1,000 auto parts workers at Magna's Integram facility in Windsor, Ontario, to reject a union-backed concessions contract. Workers went on strike yesterday after voting by 57.9 percent to oppose the four-year deal negotiated by Unifor and corporate management.

The workers manufacture seats, which are used by a number of automakers in the local area, including the General Motors-owned Cami plant in Ingersoll and Fiat-Chrysler's Windsor facility. Last week, a Unifor official predicted that up to 50,000 workers could be impacted if a strike at Integram went ahead.

The terms of the rejected deal included the retention of the hated two-tier wage system, with new hires starting on a 10-year "progression" to top wages. It also contained pay increases in the first two years of 2 percent that would barely keep pace with inflation and which amount to nothing after more than a decade of pay freezes.

The resistance of the workforce to Unifor's attempt to impose concessions came as the union concluded the enforcement of rotten four-year agreements at the Detroit Three's Canadian operations. Ford workers voted Sunday by just 58 percent in favour of the pattern deal already rammed through at GM and Fiat-Chrysler. According to initial Unifor figures, 88 percent supported the deal at its Windsor operations, indicating that a substantial "no" vote was registered at Ford's large Oakville plant. Figures for Oakville were not immediately available.

Reports from the Oakville meeting said that Unifor President Jerry Dias, facing widespread opposition, sought to blackmail Ford workers into backing the sellout deal. Dias proclaimed that Ford had threatened to shift production to China if workers voted down the

agreement and took strike action, potentially costing up to 1,000 jobs.

Integram workers are demanding higher pay increases and a reduction in what they must pay to obtain benefits. These demands are more than justified. Magna is a highly profitable, globally active auto parts supplier, counting several top automakers among its customers. Earlier last week, it reported a sales increase in the third quarter of more than 15 percent as total sales came in at over \$8 billion.

Speaking like a corporate executive, Unifor Local 444 President Dino Chiodo vowed to do all he could to keep the strike as brief as possible. "This is definitely a challenge for us," he told the *Windsor Star*. "We will set up meetings [with the company] as quickly as we can to try to figure out how we can mitigate any type of losses."

For union bureaucrats like Chiodo, the work stoppage is not viewed as an opportunity for workers to fight for better pay and conditions, but as an obstacle to the maintenance of the close working relations enjoyed by Unifor with corporate management, which relies on the union to enforce its dictates against the workers it claims to represent.

In an interview with CBC, Chiodo could not conceal his frustration at the Integram workforce for daring to reject the bureaucracy's best-laid plans. Remarking on the desire of workers to walk out as the strike deadline approached Thursday night and a deal had not been finalized, he declared, "I was very encouraged by the agreement that we had put together, but people wanted to walk out at 11:59 p.m., because we were still working with the company and that's just not something I'm used to."

Unifor instead extended the strike deadline and reached a tentative agreement in the early hours of

Friday morning.

Chiodo singled out younger workers in particular for their resistance to the deal and readiness to strike, adding ominously, “There’s a lot of education that has to happen.”

As if this was not enough, Chiodo sought to blame striking Integram workers for disrupting autoworkers’ jobs at GM and Fiat-Chrysler. “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 affects for everyone.”

In other words, it is the workers who had the temerity to strike, and not the insatiable demands of Magna’s corporate executives to boost profits, that are to blame for any impact the strike should have on GM and Fiat-Chrysler workers.

In reality, an appeal from Integram workers to their colleagues throughout the auto industry to support their strike would undoubtedly be met with enthusiasm. Barely a month has passed since Unifor rammed through rotten contracts at GM and Fiat-Chrysler in the face of widespread anger and opposition, and Sunday’s vote at Ford revealed even deeper hostility to the union’s sellout deal. The terms rejected by Integram workers, the despised two-tier wage system and a miserable pay increase after a decade of pay freezes, were the same as those imposed at the Detroit Three operations in Canada.

There is no doubt that the Integram strike will be sold out if it remains under the control of Unifor. Chiodo’s comments make clear that the union bureaucracy will isolate Integram workers from their brothers and sisters at GM, Fiat-Chrysler and Ford because they fear the threat of a broader mobilization of autoworkers to their privileged positions. As the vote by Integram workers demonstrates, like those by US autoworkers at Fiat-Chrysler and parts supplier Nexteer in 2015, resistance by autoworkers throughout North America to wage cuts and attacks on working conditions can only develop in rebellion against the trade union bureaucracy.

The voting down of the concessions contract is an important first step. But a successful struggle can only be waged if striking workers take control of their fight out of the hands of the union bureaucrats by forming

their own independent action committee to lead the strike. Such a committee should issue an urgent appeal for autoworkers in Canada and throughout North America to join in a common struggle to obtain secure and decent-paying jobs, a safe retirement and the overturning of all concessions imposed by Unifor and the corporate bosses.



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