

Autoworkers reach a deal with Ford, a breakthrough toward ending strikes against Detroit automakers

by The Canadian Press

October 26, 2023

DETROIT (AP) — The United Auto Workers union said Wednesday it has reached a tentative contract agreement with Ford that could be a breakthrough toward ending the nearly 6-week-old strikes against Detroit automakers.

The four-year deal, which still has to be approved by 57,000 union members at the company, could bring a close to the union's [series of strikes](#) at targeted factories run by Ford, General Motors and Jeep maker Stellantis.

The Ford deal could set the pattern for agreements with the other two automakers, where workers will remain on strike. The UAW called on all workers at Ford to return to their jobs and said that will put pressure on GM and Stellantis to bargain. Announcements on how to do that will come later.

“We told Ford to pony up, and they did,” President [Shawn Fain](#) said in a video address to members. “We won things no one thought possible.” He added that Ford put 50% more money on the table than it did before the strike started on Sept. 15.

UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, the chief negotiator with Ford, said workers will get a 25% general wage increase, plus cost of living raises that will put the pay increase over 30%, to above \$40 per hour for top-scale assembly plant workers by the end of the contract.

Previously Ford, Stellantis and General Motors had all offered 23% pay increases. When the talks started Ford offered 9%.

Assembly workers will get 11% upon ratification, almost equal to all of the wage increases workers have seen since 2007, Browning said.

Typically, during past auto strikes, a UAW deal with one automaker has led to the other companies matching it with their own settlements.

GM said in a statement it is “working constructively” with the union to reach an agreement as soon as possible. Stellantis also said it's committed to reaching a deal “that gets everyone back to work as soon as possible.”

Browning said temporary workers will get more in wage increases than they have over the past 22 years combined. Temporary workers will get raises over 150% and retirees will get annual bonuses, he said.

“Thanks to the power of our members on the picket line and the threat of more strikes to come, we have won the most lucrative agreement per member since Walter Reuther was president,” Browning said. Reuther led the union from 1946 until his death in 1970.

Fain said that the union's national leadership council of local union presidents and bargaining chairs will travel Sunday to Detroit, where they'll get a presentation on the agreement and vote on whether to recommend it to members. Sunday evening the union will host a Facebook Live video appearance and later will hold regional meetings to explain the deal to members.

While on the picket line at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant west of Detroit Wednesday night, local union leaders invited workers across the road to the union hall for a briefing on the deal. As they trickled out of the building, many were smiling and most were relieved.

"It's an emotional time for me. I'm emotional," worker Keith Jurgelewicz said as his eyes welled up with tears. "But just super excited that this is over with. I just can't wait to get back to work and just get on with my life."

Jurgelewicz said he is happy that the end of the strike came during his shift on the picket lines, where he has faithfully appeared for all of his shifts.

"Hopefully, GM and Stellantis can get their deals done. ... Historic day for us," he said.

In a statement, President Joe Biden, who had visited GM picketers near Detroit early in the strikes and has billed himself the most union-friendly president in American history, praised the settlement. "I've always believed the middle class built America and unions built the middle class," Biden said. "This tentative agreement is a testament to the power of employers and employees coming together to work out their differences at the bargaining table in a manner that helps businesses succeed while helping workers secure pay and benefits they can raise a family on."

Workers with pensions also will see increases for when they retire, and those hired after 2007 with 401(k) plans will get large increases, Browning said. For the first time, the union will have the right to go on strike over company plans to close factories, he said.

"That means they can't keep devastating our communities and closing plants with no consequences," Browning said. "Together we have made history."

Ford said it is pleased to have reached the deal, and said it would focus on restarting [the huge Kentucky Truck Plant](#) in Louisville, as well as the Chicago Assembly Plant. The Louisville plant alone employs 8,700 workers and makes high profit heavy duty F-Series pickup trucks and big truck-based SUVs.

In all, 20,000 workers will be coming back on the job and shipping the company's full lineup of vehicles to customers, Ford said.

Ford's statement made no mention of the cost of the contract. Company executives said last week they were [at the limit](#) of what they could pay while still being able to invest in new vehicles and the transition [from internal combustion to electric vehicles](#). All three companies have said they don't want to be saddled with high labor costs that could limit their ability to invest in future vehicles and potentially force them to raise prices.

"This agreement sets us on a new path to make things right at Ford, at the Big Three, and across the auto industry. Together, we are turning the tide for the working class in this country," Fain said.

Associated Press Writer Mike Householder contributed from Wayne, Michigan.

Tom Krisher, The Associated Press