

CAW Union Supports Strike Mandate

Rob Gillies, Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Workers with the Canadian Auto Union have voted overwhelmingly to go on strike if the union isn't able to reach agreements with the Detroit three automakers.

The Canadian Auto Workers union said Monday Chrysler workers have voted 99 percent in favor of strike action if necessary. Workers at General Motors have voted 98 percent in favor while workers at Ford voted 97 percent authorized a work stoppage.

Negotiations on a new contract began earlier this month amid charges that Canada is the most expensive place in the world to produce a vehicle.

The union noted it made major concessions during the last round of talks in 2009 and said workers want to share in the profits now that the industry is profitable. The current contracts expire Sept. 17. The union will focus talks on one of the automakers before then with the idea of setting a template deal for all three.

The last CAW strike was in 1996, against General Motors.

Ford has said their labor costs are significantly higher in Canada than any other jurisdiction in which Ford operates. GM CEO Dan Akerson said in June that Canada was the most expensive place on earth to build a car these days, and Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne has also said wage rates are uncompetitive in Canada.

The CAW represents about 4,500 workers at Ford, 8,000 workers at General Motors and another 8,000 at Chrysler.

The federal Canadian and Ontario province governments worked in tandem with the U.S. government on auto bailouts in 2009 to maintain Canada's share of North American auto production. Canada's share peaked at 3.2 million cars in 1999, about 17.4 percent of North American production. In 2011, Canada produced 2.1 million vehicles, or about 16 percent.

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