

For an international strategy to win the CAMI workers strike

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on autoworkers throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico to mobilize in support of the strike by 2,800 GM Canada workers at the CAMI assembly in Ingersoll, just east of London, Ontario.

The CAMI workers have shut the assembly lines at one of the most productive and profitable facilities in GM's North American manufacturing empire. Workers at the factory are subjected to relentless speed up, labouring three shifts a day, six days a week to produce 300,000 of GM's hot-selling and lucrative Equinox sports utility vehicles annually.

This is the first strike at CAMI in a quarter of a century and the first at one of the Detroit-based automakers in Canada since the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) briefly struck GM in 1996. The Ingersoll factory, which operates under a separate labour agreement, has repeatedly been used to set concessionary benchmarks that are then used to extort rollbacks from workers across the Detroit Three's plants.

CAMI workers have said enough is enough to speed-up, multi-tier wages, the expansion of "temp" positions, and the corporate assault on jobs. Since the financial crash and GM's 2008-09 restructuring, autoworkers across North America have seen their living standards continue to plummet even as GM sits on a cash hoard of \$22 billion and showers its top investors and executives with billions in dividends and stock buybacks.

But CAMI workers cannot fight this corporate giant alone. The company is already making plans to ramp up production at other factories in Canada, the US and Mexico to offset the impact of the strike. GM has the backing of all the corporate-controlled media and the big business parties, whether it is the Liberals, Tories

and NDP in Canada or the Democrats and Republicans in the US.

While CAMI workers face considerable enemies, their potential allies are far more powerful. Throughout Canada, the US and the world, tens of millions of workers are sick and tired of relentless wage and benefit cuts, government austerity and the squandering of trillions on war. As the CAMI strike begins, mass struggles against Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron's anti-worker labour "reforms" are sweeping France. In recent years autoworkers have mounted determined struggles and challenged union sellout contracts in Mexico, China, India, the United States and most recently in Korea, Serbia and Slovakia.

A warning must be made, however. Unifor officials have made it clear they want to wrap up the strike as soon as possible. They have no intention of broadening the struggle to GM's other Canadian facilities, let alone the North American auto industry, and are utterly opposed to making the CAMI workers' struggle the spearhead of a working-class counter-offensive.

As workers walked off the job Sunday night, GM Canada issued a statement expressing disappointment that they could not reach an agreement with "our Unifor partners." They urged Unifor officials to resume negotiations "to continue working together to secure a competitive agreement."

The GM bosses' reference to their "Unifor partners" is completely accurate. Unifor and its CAW predecessor have spent the last three decades helping the company slash labour costs in the name of making GM and the other automakers "more competitive."

In comments to the media Monday, Local 88 Plant Chairman Mike Van Boekel said Unifor would send workers back into the plant even before they had a chance to review and vote on any deal reached with

management. “I would think,” said van Boekel, “if we get a tentative agreement mid-week we’d go back to work the next day, and then vote that Sunday and have everybody at least start earning some money.”

Unifor is centering the struggle at CAMI around winning meaningless product and investment “guarantees” from GM, just as it did in last year’s negotiations with the Detroit Three. In exchange for paper promises that the auto bosses can renege on the minute they say “market conditions” have changed, Unifor agreed to continue the hated two-tier system, the elimination of defined-benefit pensions for new hires, and meager wage increases (after a 10-year freeze).

Van Boekel has made clear Unifor’s demand GM recognize the Ingersoll plant as the “lead producer” of the Equinox will similarly be used to justify the union’s capitulation to GM’s concession demands. “We can yell all we want,” said van Boekel, “but if the plants are empty, there’s nothing to gain Before money, before language, we have to guarantee our jobs are there and that we can support our families.”

In fact the endless concessions handed over by Unifor and the CAW before it have never saved a single job. After a decade of frozen wages and other concessions, it has become increasingly impossible, however, for workers to support their families.

Unifor also claims that Canadian workers can defend their jobs by appealing to the Trudeau government and US President Donald Trump to renegotiate NAFTA. Unifor President Jerry Dias has repeatedly met with Trump’s Commerce Secretary, Wilbur Ross, a billionaire like Trump, and a former steel, auto parts and coal boss. Does any worker really believe these corporate parasites intend to defend the rights of workers?

The claim that workers and the auto bosses have the same “national interest” has long been used to suppress the resistance of workers and tie their fate to the relentless drive for profit. When the CAW split from the UAW in 1986 CAW leaders like Bob White claimed the lower dollar and Medicare would give Canada a competitive advantage and secure workers’ jobs. In the end this backward nationalist outlook and pro-capitalist policy paved the way for tens of thousands of layoffs and endless givebacks.

For the last three decades, the unions on both sides of the border have systematically divided workers,

assisting the automakers in whipsawing workers and ensnaring them in a race to the bottom. The real meaning of the “partnership” of the unions can be seen in the revelations that top UAW officials were paid millions in bribes to push through sellout deals at Fiat Chrysler.

The enemy of Canadian workers is not workers in Mexico, the US or anywhere else. It is the global auto companies and the Wall Street and Bay Street bankers.

Unifor officials have sought to silence opposition and brand as disloyal any opposition to its collaboration with management. If this struggle is not to be defeated, however, workers must take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of Unifor.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges CAMI workers to elect rank-and-file committees, led by the most militant and self-sacrificing workers. These committees should formulate their own demands—including the rehiring of all laid-off workers, the elimination of the hated multi-tier wage and benefit system and forced overtime, and an immediate 30 percent wage increase.

Workers must block every effort to shut down the strike and impose a sellout deal, and fight to broaden the struggle throughout the Canadian, US and Mexican auto industry.

The industrial struggle of the working class must be combined with a new political strategy, including a break with all of the capitalist parties and the building of a mass socialist political movement aimed at transforming the giant auto companies and banks into publicly owned enterprises and the reorganization of the economy to meet human need, not private profit.

The WSWS will offer CAMI workers every assistance possible in this critical battle.



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