

“What these companies are doing is a new form of slavery”

## CAMI strikers determined to resist GM Canada job and wage cuts

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21 September 2017

Nearly 2,800 autoworkers at the CAMI plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, are continuing their strike against General Motors (GM) Canada's attack on their jobs, wages and benefits. The strike, which started late Sunday night, has sharply reduced production of GM's hot-selling Chevrolet Equinox SUV. It has also caused slowdowns throughout GM's supply chain, from GM's engine and transmission plant in St. Catharines, Ontario, to Magna International, one of the world's largest component makers.

On Wednesday, the Canadian auto union, Unifor, said it was approaching GM to resume formal negotiations, which have not taken place since the contract expired on September 17. Unifor said after initial telephone and text communications, “We have found no common ground on the major issues at this time.”

While workers are determined to recoup lost wages and benefits and restore shop floor protections, Unifor has made no formal demands outside of requesting that GM designate CAMI as the “lead” factory for the production of the Equinox and output of the SUV at GM's Mexican plants be reduced.

Unifor is trying to subordinate the strike to its political alliance with the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and appeals to the billionaire US president, Donald Trump, to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Canadian union is hosting a rally Friday in the national capital of Ottawa, “urging all governments to commit to negotiating stronger labour standards in NAFTA 2.0.” The speakers will include Unifor President Jerry Dias and unnamed labour leaders from the US and Mexico.

The claim that workers can save their jobs by appealing to corporate-controlled governments and ultra-right-wing nationalists like Trump to champion “fair trade” is a cruel

deception. There is nothing fair about capitalism, a system based on the exploitation of working class for the profit. Transnationals, with the full backing of their respective governments, scour the globe to find the cheapest sources of labour and the highest profits.

If Trudeau and Trump, along with the unions, are promoting economic nationalism it is only to hog-tie workers to their respective corporate bosses and ultimately behind the preparations for trade war and shooting wars. On Wednesday Unifor staged a phony company-backed “strike” and rally at Bombardier's aerospace plant in Toronto to back the Canadian multinational in a bitter trade dispute with US-based Boeing.

Unifor, just like the United Auto Workers in the United States, has long claimed that jobs can be defended by offering endless concessions on wages, benefits and working conditions, and inciting a fratricidal struggle between workers on both sides of the border over who will work for the lowest wages and worst conditions.

This is what was behind the decision of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Unifor's predecessor, to sign a separate labour agreement with the Canadian Automotive Manufacturing, Inc. (CAMI), when it opened as a joint venture between GM and Suzuki Motors in 1986. The factory became a model for corporatist labour-management relations and Japanese-style “continuous improvement,” (i.e., continuous cost-cutting), which would supposedly “save Canadian jobs.”

After the 2009 bankruptcy restructuring of GM, the Detroit-based company took over full ownership of the plant. It has become one of the most productive and profitable GM plants in North America, based on relentless speedups, six-day workweeks and the exploitation of large numbers of lower-paid second-tier

workers and third-tier Temporary Part Time workers. The givebacks imposed on CAMI workers, including the elimination of defined benefit pensions for new hires, set the precedent for similar concessions Unifor imposed last year on workers at GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

The strike poses critical issues not just for autoworkers in Canada but throughout North America and the world. If the struggle is not to be isolated and strangled by Unifor, rank-and-file workers must take the conduct out of the hands of this pro-company organization and transform this strike into a powerful counteroffensive of the whole working class to defend the jobs and living standards of all workers.

Rank-and-file committees should be elected. These committees should make a public appeal to the Mexican workers at GM's plants in Ramos Arizpe and San Luis Potosi for solidarity and to refuse to increase production of the Equinox during the strike. The anti-Mexican chauvinism of Unifor, which undermines the international solidarity of workers and gives GM the upper hand, must be rejected.

A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with striking workers picketing the plant on Wednesday morning. One veteran worker said: "We're striking because we want to know where we are going to in five years. The company has hired Temporary Part-Time employees (TPTs) making third-tier wages while there are 400 full-time workers on layoff.

"We also want to get rid of this two-tier wage system. I'm working right next to a younger worker making half the wage—it's wrong.

Responding to the *Autoworker Newsletter's* statement, "For an international strategy to win the CAMI strike," the worker added: "I know what you mean about these global corporations pitting us against one another. I used to work at the Caterpillar locomotive factory in London[, Ontario]. In 2012 CAT locked us out because we wouldn't allow them to cut our wage and benefits in half. They wanted to go south and they wouldn't even negotiate with us. Then they closed the plant here and moved to Muncie, Indiana, where they are paying half the wages.

"I read a book by [former US Federal Reserve Chairman] Alan Greenspan where he spelled out his philosophy to move businesses around the world, like on a continuous motor, to drive down labour costs. When they come back to the country where they started workers will be so desperate they will work for pennies. They will

have a choice of feeding their families or starving to death—it's a new form of slavery."

A veteran worker told the *Newsletter*: "This is my fourth contract. I really can't tell you anything about our demands except what they say about more product. I haven't heard a thing about wages or benefits, which makes me nervous. But that's the way it works here.

"So here's the thing that really bothers me. We never hear anything particular before we're called in to vote. So we don't know if they even put up a fight on anything. But that's not the worst part. There's no democracy even though the union tells everyone how democratic they are. But if you're so democratic how come we get like a teeny little bulletin on what's in the final contract when we walk in the door, maybe get an hour at the meeting, and then we have to vote on it? What exactly are we voting on? We never see the whole deal. Man, that has bothered me big-time for years."

A newly hired young worker with two years in the plant said: "I really like what you guys say about thinking international. We always get caught up with all this free-trade stuff and before you know it, you start trying to guard your own job and then you get scared and you don't even think about how that fits into the whole picture like someone else down the road maybe is getting screwed 'cause you end up with this or that product and they don't. And maybe next year somebody in Mexico or the States gets your product and you feel screwed but they probably feel like they deserved it. And it's just a bad way of thinking. And while we're doing that, the company is laughing all the way to the bank."

Two women workers at a local parts plant commented on the strike. One said: "We're behind the strike a hundred percent. Yes, some of us are getting laid off. It's tough. But we don't hear much real complaining. Most of us understand that you've got to fight if you're going to be able to raise your family."



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