

US autoworkers express support for CAMI strikers in Canada

“We should be out on strike with them”

Jerry White
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The strike by nearly 2,800 workers at GM Canada’s CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario has entered its second week with workers determined to substantially improve their wages and working conditions and defend their jobs at one of GM’s most productive and profitable factories. The strikers have won widespread sympathy from auto and auto parts workers throughout Canada and the US, although the corporate-controlled media and the auto unions on both sides of the border have done everything to isolate their struggle.

The strike has sharply curtailed production of GM’s hot-selling and highly profitable Equinox SUV and impacted the factory’s supply chain, from the GM engine and transmission plant in St. Catharines, Ontario to Magna International, the largest Canadian auto supplier. Just at the point that the walkout is beginning to have a greater impact on GM’s bottom line, the executives of the Unifor union have indicated they are ready to shut down the strike and betray the struggle.

Late last week, Unifor Local 88 officials said they had delivered an unspecified “olive branch” proposal to GM as the basis to resume negotiations, which had collapsed as the previous labour agreement expired September 17. On Sunday, the Unifor Local 88 web site announced the union local’s Master Bargaining Committee and Unifor National representatives had met with the company Sunday, and that the union had “tabled a very comprehensive package to resolve issues and end our strike. The proposal addresses our outstanding items; such as job security, economics and contract language.

“The ball is now in the Company’s court. We await their response,” local officials wrote, adding in the

most obsequious terms, that “the Master Bargaining Committee, and our Unifor National Representatives, are available to meet at a moment’s notice.”

All of this is being done behind the backs of workers. Unifor officials have not released the details of their offer and have steadfastly ignored the demands of workers for both job and financial security. The only public demand Unifor has made is for a paper promise from GM to make the Ingersoll facility the “lead” plant for the production of the Chevrolet Equinox SUV. It has combined this with a poisonous “made in Canada” campaign, which falsely presents Mexican GM workers as the enemy, while portraying big business shills like Justin Trudeau and the fascistic billionaire US President Donald Trump as supposed friends of workers.

Far from uniting Canadian, US and Mexican workers in a common struggle, Unifor has done everything to protect the profit interests of GM and weaken and divide workers. A GM worker from the St. Catharines plant wrote in to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to say, “About 250 GM workers in St. Catharines are being laid off due to the Cami strike. They are NOT going to get Supplementary Unemployment Benefits because of a deal between the Unifor bureaucracy and GM whereby if they are laid off due to a strike against GM they will not be entitled to these benefits. They will consequently get no money the first week of the layoff and only Employment Insurance benefits after that. They are not pleased.”

US autoworkers who spoke with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* expressed their solidarity with striking CAMI workers on Saturday during a shift change at Fiat Chrysler’s truck assembly plant in the

Detroit suburb of Warren, Michigan. In 2015, FCA workers rebelled against the UAW and voted down a concessions contract by a 2-to-1 margin. The UAW then employed job threats, intimidation and outright fraud to push a second contract through, which maintains the hated two-tier wage system and 10-hour workdays. It has now been revealed that top UAW officials involved in the negotiation of that sellout deal, and previous ones, received \$4.5 million in bribes from FCA executives.

Like CAMI workers, FCA workers are facing global auto giants—FCA is now entertaining a possible merger with Korean-based Hyundai—but they are hamstrung by the nationalist policies of the UAW, which predictably has done nothing to inform US workers about the CAMI strike.

While workers at the Warren Truck plant were largely unaware of the strike they were eager to read about it in the newsletter. One worker said, “I don’t know why no one is talking about it.”

Another said, “They don’t tell us anything. They just expect us to do what they tell you.”

A veteran Warren Truck worker responded strongly to the call by the newsletter for support to the CAMI workers and the international unity of the working class. “Of course, workers have to stand together. We can’t let them pit ourselves against each other by threatening to move our jobs.”

Asked why the UAW had said nothing about the strike by brother CAMI workers in Canada one worker replied, “The union and company are all in bed together. They are all a bunch of crooks.”

Another added, “They try to keep everyone fighting against one another.”

The Warren Truck plant has large numbers of second-tier young workers forced into the eight-year “in progression” wage treadmill by the UAW. Upon hearing about the strike from a campaigner, one shouted, “We should be out on strike with them.”

A newly hired worker added, “I’ve got a new born baby but they haven’t hired me on as a full-time worker yet. I thought my paycheck would be more but after I saw it I said I better keep my second job. I’m working seven days a week and I’m dragging myself into the plant.

“I want to tell the Canadian workers to go for it and fight, especially after what the auto companies did to

us. As far as the UAW, they are all in cahoots with management and always buddying up to the bosses.”

A young worker with four years, added, “I think we should all be standing up together—US, Canadian and Mexican. It would be better if every worker in North America stood up instead of fighting each other.”

A young contract worker said: “I’ve been to Brampton and Windsor and I see a lot of workers crossing the border to come here for work. Things are hard for everyone. As for as the big companies like GM, Chrysler and Caterpillar they don’t care where they go geographically as long as they can get cheaper labour and higher profits. The unions say one thing about solidarity but then they have us working against each other.”



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