

As CAMI strike continues, Unifor sheds crocodile tears for Mexican workers

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At the protest against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in Ottawa last month and again during last Sunday's plant rally for 2,800 autoworkers striking at the General Motors' CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, officials from the Canadian autoworkers union, Unifor, postured as friends of Mexican autoworkers, not their enemies.

Presenting a \$150,000 cheque to the Mexican Red Cross for the relief effort in Mexico City after the deadly September 19 earthquake, Unifor Local 88 President Dan Borthwick said, "Our fight is not with the workers in any country, including the United States and Mexico. Our fight is with the corporations and the governments that use NAFTA, a corporate trade agreement, and a tool for corporate greed and exploitation."

At the plant rally last Sunday, Unifor national president Jerry Dias said NAFTA "sucked for Canadian workers. It sucked for workers in the United States. And the workers who got our jobs in Mexico, it sucked for them as well because they don't even make enough money to buy the cars they're building. So, we've all gotten screwed and we are all in this together."

Dias does not care to explain how his supposed concern for the plight of Mexican workers squares with the union's demand that in the event of falling demand for the Equinox, GM should lay off workers at its Mexican plants before any workers at CAMI.

Canadian workers must fight to defend their jobs. But a job is no less important to a worker and his or her family in Mexico. Unifor's demand to defend "Canadian jobs" only plays into the hands of GM, which wants workers to compete against each other over a shrinking number of jobs and block any unified fight to the defend jobs and living standards of *all* workers.

There is no doubt that NAFTA was written to defend the most powerful corporate interests in the US and Canada and strengthen them against their rivals in the European Union and Asia. It certainly accelerated the destruction of hundreds of thousands of better paying jobs in the north and an

expansion of low-paying jobs in the south. It also enabled US and Canadian agribusinesses to wipe out two million small farmers in Mexico, creating a mass migration of impoverished peasants both out of the country and into the cities, where GM, Magna International and other corporations could exploit an ample supply of poverty-stricken workers.

Dias complains that NAFTA has only benefited the corporations and the "one percent," but he is now telling workers to rely on Justin Trudeau who represents the one percent, and Donald Trump and his billionaire commerce secretary Wilbur Ross, who *are* the one percent, to renegotiate a "fair" trade deal to raise Mexican workers' wages and protect jobs in Canada and the US.

Who does Dias think he's kidding? Any changes these people make to NAFTA will only be to strengthen the commercial interests of the giant corporations they speak for. At the same time, Trump's "America First" policy is also aimed at Canada, as seen last month when Ross slapped a 219 percent tariff on imported Bombardier C-Series jets to protect US-based Boeing Corporation.

For nearly four decades, the auto unions have insisted workers sacrifice everything to make "their" corporations more competitive. On this basis, the unions have given up equal pay, the eight-hour day, shop floor representation, cost of living adjustments and fully employer paid pensions. As a result, it is not only the Mexican workers who cannot afford the cars they build, but also tens of thousands of Canadian and US autoworkers stuck in 10-year "grow-in" periods and second- and third-tier wages and benefit schemes.

Economic nationalism has always been used to divide the international working class and subordinate workers to the ruthless profit drive of their ruling classes. At the same time, big business politicians and the unions promote nationalism to divert workers' anger outward and away from the capitalist system, which benefits only a super wealthy minority at the expense of the working class throughout the world.

In the 1980s, the unions on both sides of the border

organized "Smash the Jap" events to demolish Japanese imports while the UAW and CAW solidified their "partnerships" with corporate management and imposed one concession after the other. This racist campaign culminated in the 1982 killing of Chinese immigrant Vincent Chin who was bludgeoned to death in Detroit by a Chrysler foreman and his laid-off autoworker stepson who thought the young man was a Japanese national.

As many veteran workers will remember, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union was formed on the basis of a nationalist campaign to split from the UAW and go it alone based on the lower Canadian dollar and a state-funded health care system that temporarily attracted investment from the Detroit auto companies. Canadian UAW Director Bob White, rather than seek to mobilize the seething resentment of hundreds of thousands of American autoworkers against the concessions policies of the union and the slash and burn rampage of the companies, repudiated the decades-long international links between workers on both sides of the border and opened the door for the vicious whip-sawing that soon became the primary strategy of the auto bosses.

The unions have modified their anti-foreigner rhetoric because workers have increasingly come to see their fellow workers in China, Mexico, India and other impoverished countries not as subservient slaves looking to rob Canadian and US workers of their livelihoods, but their class brothers and sisters fighting the same global auto companies.

There have been major autoworkers' struggles over the last two decades in Mexico. The Nissan plant in Aguascalientes saw 1,700 workers engage in a one-day strike in 2004. At the Honda plant in El Salto, 2,000 workers went on strike in 2013. Roughly 13,000 workers at the Volkswagen plant in Puebla, near Mexico City, struck in 2001, 2006 and 2009. Over the last decade a wave of strikes by autoworkers in China has led to a 160 percent increase in wages, while real wages in the US and Canada have remained frozen.

Like their US and Canadian counterparts, however, Mexican workers are straitjacketed with trade unions controlled by the corporations and big business political parties. Many autoworkers are "organized" by the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which has been dominated since its inception by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of current president Enrique Peña Nieto. The government-controlled union negotiates contracts behind the backs of workers and works closely with the companies to enforce concessions.

Unifor and the UAW are no less tools of the corporations and capitalist governments. The revelations that Fiat Chrysler executives paid multi-million dollar bribes to top UAW officials to sign "company friendly contracts" only

underscores this point.

The global integration of production is a phenomenon that autoworkers see before their eyes every day. GM today has operations in 31 countries like other transnationals. About 25 percent of all parts in a "Canadian made" vehicle come from another country. In the US and Mexico that number rises to 40 percent. GM can shift the production of entire models from one plant or one country to another, as it has with model flips from Spring Hill, Tennessee to San Luis Potosi or with this summer's transfer of CAMI Terrain production to Mexico, which was meant to serve as a threat to CAMI workers in advance of contract talks.

If the corporations have an international strategy, why shouldn't workers have a real international strategy? The predations of global capitalism must be opposed from the standpoint of the interests of the international working class, not lining up with this or that section of big business. That means rejecting the economic nationalism promoted by Unifor, the UAW and other unions, and forging the strongest bonds with workers in the US and Mexico.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* urges CAMI workers to form rank-and-file strike committees to outline their demands for substantial improvement in wages, benefits and working conditions, and to oppose any sellout agreement brought back by Unifor.

These committees should use social media to establish direct lines of communication with workers in the San Luis Potosi and Ramos Arizpe plants in Mexico, along with US autoworkers. In this way, the basis can be laid for a common struggle by the international working class, which takes as its starting point the social right of all workers to good-paying and secure jobs, not what the corporations and governments say they can afford.

The industrial mobilization of the working class must be combined with a new political strategy based on the fight for international socialism. Giant corporations like GM must be transformed into public enterprises, democratically controlled and collectively owned by workers themselves, as part of the socialist reorganization of the North American economy to meet human needs, not corporate profits.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and its *Autoworker Newsletter* are leading this fight and will provide every assistance to workers seeking a path forward.



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