

Canadian Fiat Chrysler worker: “Stay strong, workers, and demand answers to your questions”

Talks resume in CAMI strike as Unifor continues to isolate embattled workers

Shannon Jones
12 October 2017

Talks between Unifor and General Motors resumed Tuesday in the strike by 2,800 workers at the CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario.

The CAMI workers are engaged in a fight that has vital implications for autoworkers across Canada and globally and deserves the support of all workers. However, Unifor has isolated the struggle, now in its fourth week, and has opposed any effort to expand the strike.

Workers are determined to seek substantial pay and benefit gains after years of concessions under conditions where GM and the all US-based auto manufacturers are reaping billions in profits.

Contract talks are being conducted in total secrecy. Unifor has not presented its demands to the workers for debate and discussion, despite claiming that significant progress has been made. The call for the defense of the jobs of the CAMI workers is being presented in terms of nationalist calls by the Unifor leadership for the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, pitting workers in Canada against their brother workers in Mexico.

Nor has the million-member Canadian Labour Congress taken any action to defend the strikers besides offering verbal support.

In a sign of deep crisis, Unifor officials have reacted with hostility, including the use of physical intimidation, against WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters. This includes the assault on a WSWs reporter by a Unifor operative during the October 6 strike support rally outside the plant in Ingersoll.

Autoworkers contacted by the *Autoworker Newsletter*

expressed support for the striking CAMI workers and opposed efforts by Unifor to silence the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

A veteran Ford skilled trades worker from Oakville, Ontario gave the following comments: “I asked our local union officials when we would be going out in support of the CAMI workers and they told me ‘no chance’.

“At CAMI they are negotiating, but no one knows what it is. They will try to starve them back and they will get a bum deal. The union will try to ram it through by monopolizing the microphone.

“It is just a matter of picking each plant off one at a time. Just going there and standing on the picket line with them only gives them a moral boost. You won’t win any battles by isolating plants on strike.

“It is a vicious circle. We haven’t had a real raise in 10 years and there is no cost of living. We are working for essentially the same wages we had in the late 1970s. They aren’t hiring people, instead they are forcing people to work overtime.”

Commenting on the Unifor leadership, the veteran Ford worker said, “It is a clique in there. If you don’t fit in the clique, you won’t get in. They are re-running the election here in Local 707 in Oakville because of fraud. There were things like retirees, who had died, voting. A lot of stuff was going on.”

Referring to the attack on the WSWs, he said, “I read all your material. I am not a full-fledged socialist, but I do believe in democracy.”

Another veteran worker from the Oakville Ford plant sent a message to the *Autoworker Newsletter*. He wrote,

in part, “The WSWS has been at the forefront waving the autoworkers’ flag of our strife from the inception of this round of negotiating. They have been a pillar of truth and strength.

“I denounce violence of any kind anywhere. It is the unfortunate side effect of ignorance. Handle others the way we ourselves would like to be treated. As workers in ever changing times it’s imperative we project ourselves as a group who deserves better, if we do I’m positive our struggle will not go unnoticed. Carrying ourselves respectfully will bring more attention to our cause, we are simply asking to be respected”.

A veteran worker at the Fiat Chrysler van plant in Windsor added, “As a one-time union insider I know full well the practice of keeping a tight lid on any leaks regarding ‘negotiations’. Unifor will not allow meaningful discussion to take place among workers and will railroad through the agreement the administrative arm of the union has struck with the corporation. The ratification process is a mockery of any rules of order and the bullying continues relentless as your reporter well knows.

“Voting for the contract takes place at the onset of the questions period. So many of the members never hear a single question. They only hear the union version of how this latest agreement is fantastic for all.

“Fantastic indeed, if you consider a 10-year grow-in for new hires fantastic, and maybe no benefits upon retirement. How about a defined contribution pension for a new hire while I get to enjoy my defined benefit pension, at least for now?

“The union has no fight left in them. Even the rebel reps have slid into the safe messaging provided by the appointed spin people who troll the members’ Facebook, Twitter and other social media to try to stay on top of dissenters.

“The Unifor president and his executives have damaged the integrity of what a union should be for. I could go back seven years ago when GM closed the transmission plant in Windsor. The local unions in Windsor and St. Catherines were being whipsawed against each other by the corporation, and the union slogan, ‘Fighting back makes a difference,’ did nothing.

“I hope the CAMI workers get a better outcome than what we have in Windsor. I support all the workers and want to pay a tribute to Ms. Cathy Austin who stood up

to protect the democratic rights of the WSWS reporters. Stay strong, workers, and demand answers to your questions. Hold these people accountable, broom them out if they are failing you. Your fight is our fight too.”

A skilled worker employed by a third-party contractor told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “As a millwright who has worked in various auto and auto parts plants, it is encouraging to see the fight being waged by the CAMI Ingersoll workers against the company’s attack on their wages and working conditions. However, this struggle can only be successful if CAMI workers break with the corrupt and pro-company union leadership and form their own independent organizations to carry forward the fight.

“Throughout my work placements, I have seen firsthand the results of union-company ‘partnership’: two and three-tier workforces, six-day workweeks, rampant work speed-up, and the flouting of basic safety considerations. These have led to innumerable injuries, strains to family life, and incredible financial hardship—all while the union bureaucrats enjoy six-figure salaries and corporations shower the shareholders with billions in profits. Don’t listen to your union leaders!

“I agree with the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* and denounce last week’s attack on their reporter. American, Mexican, and international autoworkers are not your enemy, but your closest allies. Only in uniting with them against the union-corporate conspiracy can you win this fight.”

An 82-year-old retired GM worker in Michigan who has intimate knowledge of the corporatist labor-management programs at the center of the bribery scandal in the United Auto Workers union told the *Autoworker Newsletter* he supported the CAMI strikers. Defending the WSWS, he said, “I love your daily posts because you are talking about what is really going on. You are putting out unbiased factual activity, in my opinion, backed with data, more than anyone else put together.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact