

Build rank-and-file committees! Unite Canadian, US and Mexican workers against job cuts!

GM threatens CAMI plant, demands Unifor end month-long strike

Carl Bronski, Jerry White
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With the strike by nearly 2,800 autoworkers at General Motors' CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario approaching the one-month mark, the battle is at a critical turning point.

On Thursday, Jerry Dias, the president of the Canadian autoworkers union, Unifor, said GM threatened to ramp up production of its popular Equinox SUV at two Mexican plants to make up for lost production at the strikebound factory in Ingersoll unless Unifor calls off the walkout and orders its members back to work.

It is clear GM is determined to defeat the strike and deliver a humiliating blow to CAMI workers because they have dared to fight for improved wages and working conditions. In the eyes of top corporate management and its Wall Street advisors, it is better to snuff out a potential rebellion before it infects workers at other plants throughout Canada, the US and in Mexico itself.

The company has been emboldened because it has long taken the measure of Unifor, which, along with its predecessor union, the Canadian Auto Workers, has spent more than three decades suppressing workers' resistance to the corporation's relentless cost cutting. Far from mobilizing the industrial and political strength of working class behind the CAMI workers, Unifor and the other unions have isolated the strikers, leaving them without health benefits and on a starvation ration of \$250 a week in strike pay.

It is imperative that CAMI workers and other autoworkers take the conduct of this struggle into their own hands through the election of rank-and-file strike committees. Such committees should break the isolation of the strike and reach out to the 20,000 GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers in Oakville, Oshawa, Windsor, Brampton, St. Catharines and other auto plants for joint strike action. These committees should make a special appeal to workers in the US and

Mexico, including at GM's San Luis Potosi and Ramos Arizpe plants, to refuse extra work and wage a common fight.

Unifor President Dias responded to GM's threats with his typical bluster. "This is General Motors dropping the gauntlet on autoworkers in Canada and the United States and saying, 'we're going to be sourcing your jobs to Mexico and there's not a damn thing you can do about it'", Dias told Canadian broadcaster CBC.

"Well, there's a lot we can do about it", he continued. "General Motors declared war on Canada, so we're obviously not going to take it sitting down. We're going to do what we need to do to get their attention... [The] strike that's going on right now at CAMI is going to continue. And I'm not sure when things are going to end," he said.

In other words, the union is going to continue to leave the CAMI workers to fight this battle alone. The last thing the Unifor executives want is an expansion of the struggle that would disrupt its longstanding "partnership" with the auto bosses. Just last year Dias & Co. rammed through a sellout deal that enshrined the hated two-tier system, increased the use of third-tier temporary workers, cut benefits, abolished a defined benefits pension for new hires and continued the de facto freeze in real wages that has lasted more than a decade.

Consistent with the nationalist poison peddled by Unifor, Dias calls GM's threats a "war on Canada" as if Canada is not, like every other nation, a country riven by the vast chasm between the working class and the billionaires who seek to extract the last drop of profit from the sweat of the workers.

His choice of language is no accident. From the beginning of the strike, the union has used the CAMI workers as pawns in its maneuvers with Justin Trudeau's Liberal government and the Trump administration in the US over renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Unifor is looking to maintain its dues base in Canada by aligning with the big-business Liberals, based on contract concessions, grants and interest-free loans to the corporations, support for a low Canadian dollar that only serves to jack up consumer prices and reduce workers' real wages, and the continued imposition of social spending cuts and other measures to boost the insatiable profit drive of big business on the backs of the working class.

According to Dias, not only should workers look to Trudeau, they should also work with the fascistic president of the United States, Donald Trump, and his billionaire crony, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, with whom the Unifor president has met repeatedly. What worker in his right mind would swallow the proposition that Trump, who seeks to slash corporate taxes, deregulate Wall Street, balloon the military budget, deport immigrants and threaten trade and shooting wars across the globe would pursue policies favourable to workers anywhere?

While Dias hoped to get a trade deal based on the US and Canada ganging up on Mexico, that strategy appears to be collapsing as trade tensions have erupted between the two northern countries. Once again, Unifor's nationalist strategy is leading workers into a dead end.

In his interview with the CBC, Dias stated that the Mexican government of Enrique Pena Nieto is simply an "arm of the corporations" and will do nothing to raise the wages of the highly exploited Mexican autoworkers. That is certainly true. But the big-business governments of the Liberals in Ottawa and the Republicans and Democrats in Washington are no less the servants of the corporations. And Unifor in Canada and the UAW in the United States are no less subservient accomplices of the corporations and their respective capitalist governments than their Mexican counterpart, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de México, CTM).

The sole concern of Dias & Co. is preserving its dues income in Canada, no matter how impoverished the dues-paying workers are. Unifor has already granted GM millions in cost savings at the CAMI plant, with a network of "team leaders" enforcing six-days-a-week production schedules, an abusive absentee program and the opportunity to replace 1,000 higher paid workers who are retiring over the next three-four years with a new crop of low-paid and brutally exploited workers.

For GM, however, this is not enough. The corporation and its Wall Street and Bay Street backers are seeking another precedent-setting contract at CAMI that it can use to whipsaw workers throughout the industry. GM is counting on Unifor to wear down the resistance of CAMI workers and starve them into submission.

Autoworkers have seen this movie before: the union will

come back with a sellout, saying it is the best it can get, then they will call a snap ratification meeting where workers are presented with self-serving "highlights," after which union officials repeat management's threats of layoffs and plant closings to push it past the rank and file.

This cannot be allowed. First of all, workers must break through the conspiracy of silence enforced by union and management. The argument that workers must be kept in the dark so the union can negotiate effectively is a fraud. Everybody knows exactly what is being discussed, except the workers whose lives are at stake.

Workers have the right to know what is being discussed behind closed doors. Rank-and-file workers should be present at all talks so they can report details to their fellow workers. At the same time, rank-and-file workers should formulate their own demands: for the abolishing of the two-tier system and the transformation of all part-time workers into full-time employees, an immediate 30 percent wage increase and the restoration of COLA to make up for lost income, and the rehiring of all laid-off workers.

Before any ratification vote, workers must demand access to the full contract, plus all the appendixes and secret letters of agreement, and a full week to study and debate its contents. In the meantime, workers must demand a tripling of strike pay. Instead of squandering workers' dues money on backing big-business Liberals and New Democratic Party politicians, this money should be used to sustain the fight.

Unifor officials have waged a campaign of intimidation against the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* because they want to take away the only voice rank-and-file workers have to express their opposition and break the isolation of their struggle. The newsletter will not back down. We urge CAMI workers to contact us to help form rank-and-file committees and mobilize the broadest support among workers and young people for this decisive struggle.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact