

Echoing Trump, Unifor pleads for GM to cut Mexican auto jobs

Carl Bronski
22 December 2018

Unifor President Jerry Dias and local union officials from General Motors' Oshawa, Ontario assembly plant met in Detroit with representatives of GM's top brass Thursday to discuss the impending closure of the Canadian facility. A GM restructuring plan, announced last month, calls for the elimination of all 2,500 jobs at the Oshawa plant and another 12,200 production and white-collar jobs in the United States.

At a press conference Thursday afternoon, Dias said the union presented the automaker with "options" for the Oshawa complex, which for decades was GM's flagship manufacturing facility in Canada and as recently as the late 1980s employed more than 20,000 workers.

The meeting with senior GM executives came on the heels of Unifor placing four full-page ads in the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*, and purchasing prime-time television and radio commercials in Canada so as to foment anti-Mexican chauvinism. The ads, which included imprints of the US and Canadian flags, demanded auto jobs be slashed in Mexico in order to maintain jobs and production in Canada and the United States.

"U.S. and Canadian workers made GM. Why should our jobs go to Mexico? Keep our plants open," stated Unifor's front-page *Detroit Free Press* advertisement. More ads inside the newspaper said, "GM has made excuses for closing five plants in Canada and the U.S. But really it's about moving our jobs and our products to Mexico." And "GM, if you sell here, you have to build here."

This is nationalist poison. The fight to save jobs in Canada or anywhere else cannot be waged on the basis of anti-Mexican chauvinism. Unifor and the US-based United Auto Workers (UAW) have long spewed such nationalist filth to divide workers and justify their corporatist partnership with the auto corporations.

For decades, Unifor (the former Canadian Auto Workers, or CAW) and the UAW have pitted workers against each other, helping the automakers to whip-saw jobs, wages, pensions and benefits back and forth across borders in a never-ending race to the bottom.

The enemies of US and Canadian autoworkers are not the

workers in Mexico, Asia or Europe, but the global auto corporations and the giant banks and financial institutions, which are attacking workers all over the world.

Shortly after GM's November 26 announcement of the closure of its Oshawa, Detroit-Hamtramck, and Lordstown, Ohio assembly plants, Dias blustered, "If I had my way we'd shut down every General Motors manufacturing plant in Canada and the United States until they got the message. That's how I'd deal with it."

What poppycock. Unifor sprang into action to shut down the spontaneous walkout that workers at Oshawa GM mounted on the morning of the 26th upon learning of the automaker's plans to close the facility. At a hastily organized meeting at the Oshawa Local 222 headquarters and a press conference later on the 26th, Dias and other Unifor officials insisted workers return to work at their next shift the following day. On the 27th, just hours after Canada's Liberal government had illegalized a postal workers' strike, Dias conferred with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. At the conclusion of their meeting, Dias told workers to have confidence Trudeau and his government will "fight" for their jobs.

The son of a UAW/CAW bureaucrat, Dias has made a career out of preventing and sabotaging strikes and plant occupations whilst imposing one concessions contract after another in the name of "saving jobs."

Dias' occasional threats of "big" and "significant" actions against GM in the new year are a charade, put on to derail any genuine struggle.

When auto-parts workers in several Ontario cities occupied their plants in the wake of the 2008-2009 global economic meltdown, Dias was dispatched as union point-man to end the worker's militant actions. In addition, along with his then boss, CAW President Buzz Hargrove, Dias opposed shop-floor job action at the Oshawa truck plant in favour of a short-lived and toothless "blockade" of GM management offices when that plant was issued its closure announcement in 2008.

Soon after, the CAW, working hand in hand with the

federal Conservative and Ontario Liberal governments, imposed wage and benefit cuts of more than \$20 an hour on GM, Chrysler and Ford workers—as part of a so-called auto industry bailout under which jobs and plants have continued to be destroyed, while investors have made tens of billions in profits.

Unifor’s virulent nationalism is equally shared by the UAW in the United States. Ever since the CAW broke away from the UAW, the two union apparatuses have competed as to which can offer the automakers the most profitable terms through wage and benefit cuts and the expansion of multi-tier and temporary workforces.

A key tenet of Unifor’s campaign to “save” the Oshawa plant is that it is among the most productive in the GM chain and that GM investors would, therefore, be better-served, if the axe fell elsewhere. The UAW, meanwhile, has remained conspicuously silent on the Oshawa closure, signalling that it would be more than happy to strike a deal at the expense of GM workers on the other side of the border.

What Unifor and the UAW do have in common is their mutual support for the trade war positions of US President Donald Trump. Dias stated after a recent conversation with UAW President Gary Jones that they agreed the way forward was the imposition of “serious, serious tariffs” on vehicles produced in Mexico. This is entirely in line with Dias’ repeated praise of Trump, who has made anti-Mexican chauvinism a key pretext of his ultra right-wing policies, including the militarization of the southern border and mass deportations and vilification of undocumented workers.

In his press conference in Windsor, Ontario Thursday after his meeting with GM executives across the Detroit River, Dias ditched his phony “GM is in for a hell of a fight” rhetoric. He conceded, despite his earlier bluster, that GM had “the legal right” to close the plant. There was not even a whisper of any impending strike action.

But, he suggested, GM might see some angry consumers reconsider buying one of their vehicles. After pleading with GM to re-consider options to extend sedan production at least for another year and to either extend current truck production or bring a truck product from Mexico to Oshawa, he said the union will be “respectfully waiting for GM’s response on January 7.”

Dias said he was “optimistic” that GM will “do the right thing.”

Even as the Detroit meeting was underway, GM released its own self-serving statement, promoting a feeble job re-training program for the Oshawa workers whom it is throwing onto the scrapheap. The statement said that “there are no plans for operating changes at (GM CAMI Ingersoll and St. Catharines, Ontario) **at this time.**” (emphasis added)

With increasing signs of an economic slowdown and

facing major capital outlays to develop autonomous and green vehicles, not just GM, but all the automakers are determined to increase profitability at the expense of the jobs, living standards, and health and well-being of workers around the world.

GM’s claim that it will take the time to study Unifor’s “options” has a twofold purpose. The automaker recognizes the need to shore up what it aptly calls its union “partners.” Secondly, as the WSWS has explained and was confirmed by a report in the *Automotive News*, GM intends to use its restructuring plans to extort still more concessions from US workers in the 2019 contract negotiations and from workers in Canada when their contract expires in 2020 if not before.

The predatory attacks by GM against autoworkers and the communities in which they live can and must be fought. This fight, however, will not be pursued by the official union apparatus, but only in struggle against them.

The escalating threats of plant closures and layoffs underscores the critical importance of the emergency meeting called by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* earlier this month to oppose GM plant closings. The meeting, which included GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers from throughout the American Midwest, unanimously endorsed a resolution to fight for the establishment of rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, Unifor and other unions, in all the affected workplaces, factories and neighbourhoods, to oppose the plant closures.

The resolution said these committees should advance the interests of workers against corporate management and mobilize workers, based on their own demands, including abolishing the two-tier wage system and fighting for industrial democracy. Rejecting the toxic nationalism of the UAW and Unifor, the resolution called for a fight for “the unity of American workers with our class brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico and the rest of the world.” We urge Canadian autoworkers interested in participating in this fight to contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*: auto@socialistequality.com



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact