

Unite Canadian, US and Mexican autoworkers!

Build rank-and-file committees to fight GM's plant shutdowns in Oshawa and the US

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General Motors' plan to shutter five plants in Canada and the United States with the loss of nearly 15,000 jobs is a ruthless attack on all workers that must be stopped. The destruction of over 2,600 jobs in Oshawa and some 12,000 in the United States is part of a global offensive by the auto giants to boost corporate profits by ratcheting up the exploitation of the working class. This was further underscored by Ford's announcement yesterday of thousands of job cuts in Europe.

Rank-and-file workers at the Oshawa plant, acting independently of the Unifor National and Local 222 leaderships, downed tools on Tuesday and Wednesday in response to GM's confirmation of the plant closure.

Such a bold initiative is entirely welcome. Unifor and the UAW have collaborated with the automakers for decades in imposing round after round of concessions in the name of "saving jobs." They accept the subordination of workers' jobs and livelihoods to investor profit and, therefore, are utterly opposed to any action by workers that calls GM's multi-billion-dollar profits into question.

If a struggle is to be waged, it depends upon the independent mobilization of the working class, and, most fundamentally, the mounting of a joint struggle by Canadian, US and Mexican autoworkers in defence of the jobs and living standards of *all* workers.

Unifor cannot be pressured or reformed. Workers must take the struggle into their own hands.

A decisive step in this direction was taken last month at a meeting in Detroit convened by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, where workers from all three Detroit automakers set up a Steering Committee for the building of rank-and-file factory committees independent of the control of Unifor and the UAW. The purpose of these committees is to organize a joint struggle uniting GM and other autoworkers across North America to fight the plant

shutdowns and develop a counter-offensive to roll back all concessions, including multi-tier wages.

Unifor has organized today's rally in Windsor not to mobilize the class strength of the working class against the auto bosses and their political handmaidens in Ottawa, Toronto and Washington, but as a Canadian nationalist flag-waving stunt.

Not a single appeal was made by Unifor ahead of the rally to US autoworkers, even though brothers and sisters at GM's Detroit-Hamtramck facility just a few miles away also face the imminent threat of being thrown out of work. Instead, Unifor President Jerry Dias has been whipping up the most backward nationalist sentiments, denouncing Mexican workers, and declaring at a press conference Tuesday that GM has picked a fight with the "Canadian nation."

Workers must reject this nationalist poison which only serves to divide workers.

The enemies of Canadian autoworkers are not the workers in the US, Mexico, or for that matter China, but the global auto corporations and the giant banks and financial institutions, which are attacking workers all over the world. With signs of the first recession in the global auto industry since 2009, workers in Mexico, China, Korea and every other country are facing the same attack on jobs and living standards. That is why an international strategy is needed to defend all workers.

Instead, the unions are colluding with the corporations to impose further concessions on Canadian and US workers. In the seven weeks since GM's closure announcement, Dias and Unifor have spent their time presenting proposals to GM's corporate bosses on how they can help it slash production costs at Oshawa, including by pushing out older workers in favour of low-paid multi-tier workers, if GM agrees to keep the plant

open. The union collaborates so intimately with corporate management that the local leadership at the St. Catherines plant issued a statement last week refusing to countenance support for a toothless consumer boycott of GM—let alone any serious struggle in defence of the GM Oshawa workers—on the grounds that it might hurt GM’s bottom line and “put our facility at risk.”

These anti-worker policies flow directly from the transformation of Unifor and the UAW over the past three decades into appendages of corporate management. Ever since the nationalist split from the UAW in 1985 by the Canadian Auto Workers, the unions on both sides of the border have systematically pitted Canadian, US and Mexican workers against each other, thereby helping the automakers to whip-saw jobs, wages, pensions and benefits back and forth across borders in a never-ending race to the bottom.

Dias responded to GM’s Nov. 26 closure announcement by rushing to Ottawa. The very same day that Trudeau and his Liberal government criminalized the postal workers strike, Dias stood alongside Trudeau and claimed this big business politician would fight for GM workers’ jobs.

Dias and Unifor have a decades-long history of working closely with big business governments against the interests of autoworkers and all workers. But this has reached a new level under the current Liberal government. Taking Unifor’s economic nationalist perspective to its reactionary conclusion, Dias served as an advisor to Trudeau and repeatedly met Trump’s Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross with the aim of securing changes to NAFTA that would push the burden of auto industry job cuts onto Mexican workers.

The predatory attacks by GM against autoworkers and the communities in which they live can and must be fought. But a new strategy is needed to fight.

Rank-and-file factory committees, independent of Unifor, must be organized at all GM facilities and auto plants in Canada. As well as coordinating strikes, protests and other actions to oppose plant shutdowns, these committees would appeal for joint action with workers who also face the threats of job cuts and concessions—whether it be postal workers forced to labour in terrible conditions by the Trudeau government’s back-to-work order, or Ontario public sector workers confronting the attacks of the Ford government.

In response to GM’s global strategy to boost corporate profits and shareholder payouts, workers must develop their own global response.

A fundamental task of the rank-and-file factory committees will be to unify their struggles with their brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico, and internationally. The traditions of class unity and common struggle that were forged in the bitter strikes of the 1930s, when autoworkers on both sides of the Canada-US border fought for wage increases and improvements in working conditions, should be revived and developed.

Autoworkers will also find powerful allies in the Yellow Vest protesters in France who have taken to the streets to oppose austerity and rampant social inequality, among teachers in the US who have repeatedly mounted strikes in defiance of unions aligned with big business and the Democratic Party, and among the tens of millions of workers in India who mounted a two-day general strike this week to oppose their government’s socially incendiary “pro-investor” policies.

The unification of these struggles into a working class counter-offensive for secure, decent-paying jobs and an end to corporate-dictated austerity requires a new political perspective—a socialist and internationalist program, which unites workers in struggle against the capitalist profit system.

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will offer its assistance and unflinching support to workers seeking to break out of the straitjacket imposed by the pro-company Unifor and UAW and to mobilize autoworkers across national borders. Build rank-and file committees! Attend and build the February 9 demonstration the Steering Committee for Rank-and-File Factory Committees is organizing outside GM headquarters in Detroit! Revive and develop the traditions of joint struggle of North American autoworkers against the auto bosses!



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