

# Reject the anti-Mexican campaign of the UAW and Unifor

## Unite US, Canadian and Mexican workers against GM plant closings!

Jerry White  
5 February 2019

*On February 9 at 2 p.m. EST, the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is co-hosting a demonstration in Detroit to fight plant closings, mass layoffs and concessions. For more information about attending the demonstration, go to [wsws.org/auto](http://wsws.org/auto).*

The United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Unifor union in Canada have launched a reactionary campaign calling on consumers in the US and Canada to boycott General Motors vehicles assembled in Mexico.

On Sunday night, Canadian viewers of the Super Bowl football game saw a Unifor-sponsored ad depicting Mexican flags, with a narrator's voice declaring, "GM continues to expand in Mexico, leaving workers out in the cold, a move that's as un-Canadian as the vehicles they now want to sell us."

Unifor has said it will spend "millions" on similar ads scheduled to be released during the Oscar ceremonies and professional hockey games.

Last week, UAW President Gary Jones said his union would join Unifor's efforts. In addition to the boycott of cars and trucks from Mexico, Jones added China and Poland to the list.

Jones praised President Trump's "Buy American, Hire American" initiative, saying the president "has taken important steps to adhere to the concept that the US government and consumers should Buy American." The UAW is purchasing billboard space and launching a #GMinvestinUS social media campaign.

The UAW and Unifor are presenting the boycott as an answer to GM's plans to close five plants in the US and Canada, including assembly plants in Detroit-Hamtramck, Lordstown, Ohio, and Oshawa, Ontario, and to lay off 15,000 hourly and salaried workers. Both unions have meanwhile rejected any strikes, plant occupations or mass demonstrations to stop the closures, and when Oshawa workers organized a wildcat strike last month, Unifor quickly moved in to quash it.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* and Steering Committee of Rank-and-File Committees are fighting to unite and mobilize auto workers and other sections of the working class throughout North America to stop the plant closures and layoffs. We are holding a demonstration on

Saturday, February 9 at 2 p.m. in front of GM's headquarters in downtown Detroit to call on workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-company unions. The demonstration will demand an immediate halt to all plant closures, the abolition of the two-tier wage and benefit system, the transformation of all temporary workers into full-timers, and the rehiring of all laid-off and victimized workers.

In opposition to the nationalism of the UAW and Unifor, the demonstration will call for the unity of US, Canadian and Mexican workers to fight for their common interests against their common enemies—the transnational auto companies.

The UAW-Unifor boycott campaign is absurd on many levels. First of all, there is no such thing as a "Mexican-made" car, or, for that matter, an American or Canadian one.

A modern vehicle is made up of 30,000 parts, produced and assembled by workers in dozens of countries, not to mention the workers from around the world who extract and process the raw materials that go into the vehicle. Vehicles assembled in Mexico contain components produced by US and Canadian workers whose jobs would also be imperiled by a production slump in Mexico. There are reportedly more than 60 Ontario-based auto parts companies that send components to Mexico, including GM's transmission plant in St. Catharines and stamping operations in Ingersoll.

It is a historical fact that the "Buy American" and "Buy Canadian" campaigns promoted by the unions since the mid-1970s have never saved a single job. In 1978, there were over 750,000 unionized autoworkers at GM, Ford and Chrysler. Today there are only 154,000 in the US and 22,000 in Canada.

This jobs massacre is not the product simply of the wrong-headedness of the union bureaucrats. Rather, it is rooted in the nationalist program of the unions. Incapable of responding in any progressive manner to the globalization of capitalist production in the 1980s and 1990s—which enabled transnational corporations to exploit the labor power of workers in many countries to produce a single commodity, and to distribute and shift production anywhere in the world to attain the highest rate of profit—the unions abandoned any resistance to wage-cutting, speed-up and downsizing.

Long before the term “globalization” entered the popular lexicon, the International Committee of the Fourth International explained in 1988: “The unprecedented international mobility of capital has rendered all nationalist programs for the labor movement of different countries obsolete and reactionary.” Such national programs, the ICFI explained, “are invariably based on the voluntary collaboration of the labor bureaucracies with ‘their’ ruling classes in the systematic lowering of workers’ living standards to strengthen the position of ‘their’ capitalist country in the world market.”

These nationalist campaigns really took off when the long-standing dominance of the Detroit-based Big Three automakers was first challenged by more efficient Asian and European producers. By the early 1980s, the UAW responded by officially adopting “labor-management partnership” as its guiding principle.

This coincided with a racist campaign featuring union officials smashing Toyotas with sledgehammers and sticking “Remember Pearl Harbor” bumper stickers on their cars. The UAW barred imported cars from union parking lots. The anti-Japanese agitation resulted in the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Chinese-American draftsman who was beaten to death with baseball bats by a Chrysler foreman and his unemployed son.

The anti-foreigner campaign had a three-fold purpose: To pit US workers against their fellow workers in other countries and line them up behind their “own” American bosses; to cover up for the real enemy of the workers—the corporations and the profit system; and to divert attention from the unions’ collaboration with the companies in the destruction of jobs, wages and working conditions.

In return for their services, the auto companies poured billions of dollars into the bank accounts of the union executives in the form of cash transfers, bribes, seats on corporate boards and control of corporate stock and retiree trust funds.

What has this nationalist policy produced? Entire cities like Flint, Detroit and Pontiac in Michigan; Dayton, Youngstown and Cleveland in Ohio; Oshawa, London and other cities in Ontario have been transformed into industrial wastelands.

The unions told US and Canadian workers that their enemies were workers in Mexico, China and other countries who were depriving them of their jobs and livelihoods. Now, however, US and Canadian workers are learning about the growing struggles of workers around the world and coming to realize that they are not enemies, but their class brothers and sisters.

This has been powerfully shown in the strike by 70,000 workers in Matamoros, Mexico, across the border from Brownsville, Texas, who produce seat belts, air bags, steering wheels and other components for US and Canadian-based suppliers for as little as 75 cents an hour. The courageous strike they are waging against these slave-labor conditions erupted in opposition to the corporate-controlled unions and the

government. Workers threw out the union officials, set up strike committees and held popular assemblies to advance their demands and oppose strikebreaking and victimizations.

Having thrown off the stifling grip of the unions, the striking workers saw the need to reach out to workers in the United States. They marched to the border to appeal to their counterparts on the other side to join the fight. This rebellion has terrified the corporate bosses, capitalist politicians and union executives throughout North America. The corporate-controlled media have blacked out all news of the strike.

The Matamoros workers have given a lead to all workers in all countries to break the stranglehold of the pro-corporate unions and establish genuinely democratic organizations of struggle—rank-and-file committees that refuse to accept the dictates of the companies and the capitalist politicians and fight to link up the struggles of workers nationally and internationally.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* alone have reported on the Matamoros strike and fought to rally support from workers in the US, Canada and around the world. Wherever autoworkers, whatever their nationality, have learned about the strike, they have expressed their solidarity and support.

The anti-Mexican boycott announced by the UAW and Unifor is in part a desperate, back-stabbing response by the unions to the shattering blow to their nationalist propaganda dealt by the rebellion of the Matamoros workers.

Support is growing for the February 9 demonstration. It will be the first genuine expression of rank-and-file opposition to the plant closures, layoffs and concessions. All workers—teachers, UPS and Amazon workers, public employees, as well as youth and students—should turn out to express the strength and determination of the working class and take forward the building of a mass movement in defense of jobs and living standards.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**