

As Unifor escalates racist anti-Mexico campaign

Canadian union leader postures as supporter of Matamoros strikers

Roger Jordan
6 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.

Asked by a journalist last Friday for his opinion of the strike by tens of thousands of auto parts and other workers in Matamoros, Jerry Dias, the president of Unifor (the former Canadian Auto Workers union) declared, “I’m thrilled that the Mexican workers are fighting back. They deserve decent wages and benefits.”

Among all of the lies peddled by Unifor over the past three decades to justify its collaboration in imposing wage cuts, plant shutdowns, and the gutting of workplace benefits, few could compete with Dias’ absurd and thoroughly dishonest claim that he welcomes and supports the Matamoros strikers.

The Matamoros strike, which erupted outside the control and in direct opposition to the government-recognized trade unions, has attracted broad support from rank-and-file autoworkers internationally.

Unifor and its US counterpart, the United Auto Workers, on the other hand, have responded to the workers’ rebellion in Mexico’s cheap-labor maquiladora belt with fear and anger.

Not only have they failed to take any action to mobilize support for the Matamoros workers among workers in Canada and the US, many of whom work for the same companies. They have sought to black out any mention of the Matamoros workers’ struggle.

The Unifor website has not made a single mention of the Matamoros workers’ struggle in the more than three weeks since the strike erupted, under conditions where the workers are facing reprisals, including mass firings, and the threat of state repression.

If Dias broke Unifor’s embargo on mentioning the Matamoros workers’ strike, it was only because he was asked pointblank for his opinion by a journalist from the neo-conservative *National Post*, who was writing a story on the production cuts the strike has caused at the Canadian plants of the Detroit Three automakers.

Dias’ and Unifor’s silence about the courageous struggle of the Matamoros workers is of a piece with their reactionary nationalist “Save Oshawa GM” campaign. This campaign is aimed at pitting Canadian auto workers against their class brothers and sisters in the US and Mexico, and at convincing GM that keeping its Oshawa assembly plant open would be good for its investors.

By opposing any joint struggle of US and Canadian workers against GM’s plans to shutter five plants—including the Oshawa, Ontario; Lordstown, Ohio; and Hamtramck, Michigan assembly plants—and eliminate 15,000 jobs, Unifor has made clear it would be more than ready to cut a deal with GM at the expense of US autoworkers.

But Unifor has directed its fire first and foremost against Mexican workers. This has included the inciting of anti-Mexican racism, such as the appearance at the front of a recent Unifor rally in Windsor of a woman dressed in a poncho and sombrero bearing a Mexican flag.

This filthy stunt was soon followed by Unifor’s announcement of a reactionary consumer boycott of GM vehicles assembled in Mexico.

Last Sunday, Canadian viewers of the Super Bowl were treated to a Unifor-sponsored ad that asserted, “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 long sought to demonize Mexican workers and pit Canadian workers against them.

During the recent North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) renegotiation this reached a new stage. Dias and Unifor worked in close concert with Canada's big business Liberal government and the fascistic-minded US President Donald Trump to refashion the trade bloc, so as to push the burden of any restructuring of the auto industry onto Mexican workers. While Trump fulminated against Mexican immigrants to the US and spearheaded a state witch hunt against them, Dias lavished praise on the US president and praised the auto trade deal he negotiated with Mexico as "positive." "Mexico," the Unifor president gloated, "will lose some of the jobs they've managed to take."

For decades Unifor and the UAW have mounted "save Canadian" and "American job" campaigns, inciting opposition to Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, and workers in other countries, while suppressing worker opposition to concessions and cravenly accepting one plant closure and mass layoff after another.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously pointed out, there is no such thing as a "Mexican-made" or "Canadian-made" car. In reality, the production of cars, and all other manufactured goods, occurs on a global scale, with workers supplying components and materials from virtually every continent. The globalized character of production, which has seen corporate giants like GM and Apple scour the globe to locate the cheapest labour, underscores that the working class can only oppose the joint corporate-union assault on their jobs and working conditions by unifying their struggles internationally.

Unifor and the UAW will do everything in their power to prevent such a development.

If Dias felt compelled to mouth some meaningless words of support for the Matamoros strikers, it is because he is aware that there is widespread sympathy and support for their struggle among Unifor members.

In comments to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* numerous US and Canadian workers have repudiated Unifor and the UAW's and retrograde attacks on the impoverished Mexican workers for "stealing jobs." Their comments indicate a growing understanding that the fight against layoffs and plant shutdowns requires an international response and must be based on the rejection of the subordination of workers' livelihoods to investor profits.

This is precisely what Unifor rejects out of hand and is endeavouring to prevent.

Unifor's inability to mount opposition to the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, wage cuts and multi-tier

wages and the return of sweatshop working conditions is not due to Dias' individual failings. Rather it is rooted in the nationalist, pro-capitalist character of the unions themselves.

Dias is only continuing in an especially repugnant form the nationalist campaigns waged by Unifor and the Canadian Auto Workers since 1985, when the CAW organized a split with the UAW on the basis of the fraudulent claim that a nationally-based Canadian union would be better able to defend workers' jobs and wages. In reality, the division of autoworkers in North America along nationalist lines has served as a mechanism for the decimation of jobs on both sides of the border, and deep cuts to workers' wages and workplace benefits.

Autoworkers and other workers in Canada who support the fight of their class brothers and sisters in Mexico against the corporate elite and their union accomplices should treat Dias' mendacious claims of support for the Matamoros workers with the contempt they deserve.

Above all they should support and attend the demonstration against GM's job massacre called by the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees and the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* for this Saturday, February 9 in Detroit.

The demonstration seeks to unite Canadian, US, Mexican workers in a common struggle to reverse all concessions and defend the jobs of *all* workers. As the *WSWS* explained last week, "The demonstration is based on a clear program and strategy. It is not an appeal to GM and its corporate executives, but a call for workers to express their strength and their determination to fight through the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporate-controlled unions, run by thoroughly corrupt and privileged executives."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact