

“We are in a war with social injustice that cannot be reversed without an uprising”

Oshawa autoworker speaks on wildcat strikes, Unifor treachery

Marcus Day
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Last Thursday, workers launched a courageous one-day wildcat strike at two feeder plants, Syncreon and CEVA Logistics, which supply General Motors’ assembly plant in Oshawa, Ontario, in Canada. With GM planning to wind down production at its plant in November this year, thousands of workers at both GM and numerous regional supplier plants are set to lose their jobs.

Workers at the Syncreon and CEVA plants, who are members of Unifor (formerly the Canadian Auto Workers union), have faced months of stonewalling by the union over the company’s plans to toss workers aside with the bare legal minimum of severance pay.

The plant closing in Oshawa is part of a global wave of attacks on autoworkers’ jobs, with companies from Ford, Fiat Chrysler and GM, to Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover and Hyundai carrying out layoffs on virtually every continent. Sales have increasingly slumped in China, India, East Asia and elsewhere over the last year, and trade war measures have rattled markets, with auto industry analysts speculating daily on the growing likelihood of a new major recession.

The walkout at Syncreon and CEVA, launched independently of the union, sparked extreme nervousness among Unifor officials, who scrambled to demobilize workers, while cynically feigning support for the action.

A worker at one of the feeder plants recently spoke to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* about the anger at Unifor, which boiled over last week, resulting in the walkout. He wished to remain anonymous, citing efforts by the companies to blackball workers even in

their final months of operation: “I would hate to be fired with two months left, as we know our company is now headhunting. Bastards!”

The worker directly raised the comparison between the Canadian workers’ action and that of workers in Matamoros, Mexico, earlier this year. Some 70,000 workers at numerous auto supplier plants and *maquiladora* sweatshops just across the US border conducted a wave of wildcat strikes beginning in January, in defiance of the pro-company unions. The walkouts—which for months were blacked out by the corporate media, auto companies and unions—led to parts shortages and production slowdowns at plants across North America.

The broad sympathy and inspiration which continues to be felt by workers in the US and Canada for their class brothers and sisters in Mexico was in stark contrast to the nationalist poison being spewed by Unifor President Jerry Dias and United Auto Workers President Gary Jones, who launched an anti-Mexican campaign to divert anger away from the companies exploiting workers on both sides of the borders.

The worker told the WSWS: “It was us at Syncreon and then CEVA followed. We were sick of the union’s stalling and BS excuses, so the membership had enough after six months of nothing and walked.

“Laughingly the union said it ‘supported us’ but they had no choice because they knew we would bad mouth them. They showed up and tried to tell us what to say to the media, then told us to go back to work by shift’s end. Joke! But rumors persisted we would walk again quick if we didn’t get results from the union and

company fast!

“That’s how it’s done! Just like Mexico! Screw the union! They have done nothing but misrepresent us since the closure announcement, and Dias is the biggest incompetent snake of all! How does a union leader celebrate saving 300 GM JOBS but loses 18,000 union paying members in the same breath?! This BS finally boiled over and we took it upon ourselves, NOT Unifor! They are corporate kiss-asses and nothing more! Worse than the companies and that’s the truth we know now 100%!!

“It’s so sad to hear of the tragedy and grief caused by these corporate and political Aholes. We are indeed in a war with social injustice that I feel cannot be reversed without an uprising.

“Since January we were told month after month, we would get a severance deal, as the union wasted time and leverage on our behalf, resulting in nothing. GM packages came and went and so did Dias with no updates or progress. In that time, we lost trust in the company and Unifor. The union created that divide and basically gave up, avoiding us. This cowardly inaction fueled the membership to not care to the point of walking last week when a so-called ‘deadline’ meeting was had with Syncreon US and produced zero. Once that got out, word of mouth spread, and we had enough and walked! Company doesn’t care about our 10-plus years of service. We did not care about them. Both plants basically walked out without direction from Unifor. They ran down to say they support us and had the nerve even to thank us!

“Anyway, this was what we did as a last-ditch effort to gain back some dignity and respect from the union and the company. The membership now at least feels it did something, unlike Jerry Dias’s ‘fight like hell,’ which did absolutely nothing over the past six months.

“Unifor is a complete joke, bought by companies for sure to control the workforce into submission. But this time they let their cards really show and we knew if we didn’t do something ourselves nobody would.

“We still are expecting to hear results this week from the ‘high level’ talks over the past two days so nothing is achieved yet, but we hear it’s a respectable package Unifor is going for.

“I feel literally like we had no choice in our decision because it all was ending anyway so what did we have to lose? That’s basically what happened, and we hope

in the end it works.

“Throughout this closure they [Unifor] have blatantly exposed themselves as to where their true ‘solidarity’ lies. And for that we collectively will never trust them again. When we needed them most Unifor turned their heads and ran disrespecting its membership for the last time!”

Workers should place no faith in any promises by the company or Unifor in the coming days. Clearly unsettled by the independent initiative of the workers, Dias & Co. will do everything they can to isolate Syncreon and CEVA and insist that nothing is possible except a few more dollars in a severance package.

As in the US with UAW, Unifor has done everything it can to convince workers that the plant closings and job losses are a done deal or at best a handful of jobs can be maintained in exchange for extracting more concessions from workers.

The union executives fear and are thoroughly hostile to workers organizing plant occupations or more widespread work stoppages across North America, especially as workers in the US face the threat of layoffs or more concessions in the coming contracts between the UAW and the Detroit Three auto companies.

The Oshawa workers took matters into their own hands. That is an important development. However, this must be consolidated and expanded through the building up of a network of rank-and-file committees across the auto and auto parts industry.

Above all, what is required is an international perspective and strategy to fight back against the destructive and profit-driven policies of the transnational corporations. Rank-and-file committees in Oshawa and across Canada should establish contact with workers in the US, Mexico, and beyond, in order to coordinate a cross-border struggle against plant closings and layoffs, and to fight for good-paying, decent jobs.



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