

Unifor shuts down NemaK auto parts strike in Windsor, Canada

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On Sunday evening, shortly before 46,000 US autoworkers at General Motors launched a national strike, Unifor national official Chris Taylor announced an end to the 13 day strike and blockade of the NemaK auto parts plant in Windsor, Ontario.

Taylor stated that in exchange for its climb-down, NemaK management had accepted a number of stipulations. They include that the company meet three times with the union over a 14-day period to negotiate a resolution to the plant closure dispute, and that if no agreement is reached, it be resolved through binding arbitration, with a decision due by October 31. Finally, Unifor requested that none of the 270 strikers be victimized.

The strikers, who were not allowed to discuss or vote on the Unifor-NemaK agreement, began returning to work at the 11 p.m. Sunday shift.

Bitterly opposed to mobilizing the tens of thousands of Canadian autoworkers in support of the Windsor NemaK workers' fight to prevent the imminent closure of their plant, let alone linking it with the American GM strike in a counter-offensive against the auto bosses, Unifor has handed the initiative back to the company and the capitalist state. The arbitration process will take place within the framework of Canada's reactionary labour relations system, which has produced pro-company decisions time and again.

In a September 4 decision, the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) already came down in favour of NemaK, ordering Unifor to immediately end the strike at NemaK's Windsor plant, which it declared "illegal," because workers currently have a collective agreement.

It is only a matter of time before an arbitrator, citing contract language that is standard in Unifor-negotiated contracts, rules that NemaK is within its "rights" to

close the plant, since "market conditions" have changed since the company pledged to continue production at the Windsor plant through 2022, in exchange for a wage freeze.

In a second hearing on Friday before Superior Court Justice Terry Patterson, Unifor was fined \$75,000 for failing to comply with the September 4 OLRB decision and an earlier ruling by Patterson. The court also ruled that the union would be fined \$10,000 for each additional day it remained on "unlawful strike" and that four union leaders, including national president Jerry Dias, would be personally fined \$1,000 per day. The union wound up the strike that same weekend.

Workers at the NemaK plant produce engine blocks for General Motors' Silverado and Corvette vehicles assembled in the United States, and Cadillacs made in Shanghai, China. In July, NemaK, a subsidiary of Alfa, a Mexican owned transnational conglomerate, announced that it will shutter its Windsor operation in 2020 due to the loss of its supply contract with GM China, which it says will reduce production capacity at the aluminum casting plant to below 10 percent.

Unifor had previously received "assurances" from NemaK that if the plant's workforce agreed to a wage freeze beginning in 2019, the contract due to expire in 2020 could be extended to January 2022.

At a rally in front of the plant last Thursday, Jerry Dias delivered his typical bluster. "We're here because we're not going to take this crap anymore," he shouted. Doing his bit for the pro-corporate Liberal Party's re-election campaign, Dias absurdly sought to promote the illusion that Justin Trudeau's government will intervene on behalf of the workers.

He even went so far as to suggest that General Motors (which is closing its Oshawa plant later this fall) would intervene on the workers' behalf against NemaK. For

Dias, the friends of workers in any bitter dispute are the big business Liberal Party, the management of rapacious corporate giants like GM, and anti-worker institutions designed to regulate and suppress the class struggle such as the OLRB.

During the entire dispute, Dias did not mention a word about the imminent expiration of auto contracts for 155,000 American Detroit Three workers or call for a unified mobilization of autoworkers in Canada and the US in a joint fight against their common employers.

The fact has not been lost on workers that Unifor, and its predecessor, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), have for decades imposed round after round of concessions, mass layoffs and plant closures, while suppressing worker resistance, so as to ensure the profits of the auto bosses.

After GM's announcement last November of the closure of its Oshawa assembly plant and four US facilities, Unifor worked deliberately to suppress every sign of workers' resistance, including putting a stop to rank-and-file-initiated work stoppages at the Oshawa plant. They combined their role as GM's factory police force with calls for a reactionary and divisive boycott of Mexican-built GM vehicles, and by scrupulously separating their "Save Oshawa GM" campaign from opposition to the GM closures south of the border. In Windsor, Dias and the Local 444 leadership mounted no opposition when Fiat-Chrysler recently announced its "business decision" to end the third shift and lay off 1,500 workers.

Dias only authorized strike action against Nemak because the Unifor bureaucrats are fearful they could lose control of an increasingly restive membership that is determined to fight back, beginning to break free of the union's suffocating control, and increasingly aware of the need to join forces with autoworkers in the US, Mexico and beyond.

Unifor, like all the nationally-based trade unions, is based on accepting the sanctity of private ownership of the factories, mines, railroads, depots, technologies, etc., by the world's billionaires. Workers, on the other hand, have no interest in tying their fate to the defence of the profits of the corporate owners. They must insist that their own needs for jobs and decent living conditions take precedence over investor profit.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* warns Nemak workers that if Unifor remains in control

of their struggle, they will end up with a miserable sellout in the upcoming negotiations. They should take the struggle out of the hands of Unifor through the building of a rank-and-file committee, independent of the union and representing the interests of the workers. Workers must also seek to unify their on-going fight with autoworkers across the US, Canada, Mexico and internationally.

Workers can take a first step to realizing this perspective by attending the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter's* online forum today at 7 p.m. EDT. Click [here](#) to register.



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