

# Unifor bows to court order backing De Havilland Aircraft scabbing operation at strike-bound Toronto plant

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Picketing rights for the 700 striking De Havilland aerospace workers at the Downsview manufacturing complex in Toronto have been severely restricted to the point of being rendered worthless by the Ontario Superior Court. Last week, Justice Fred Myers upheld a company complaint against the workers, members of Unifor, in another draconian decision echoing anti-worker court rulings across the country.

The injunction came in response to the strikers' actions to curtail the work being done by scabs on a nearly finished plane. Strikebreakers have been flown into the facility to prepare planes for delivery to customers. In an August 5 action cited in the company's court filing, strikers with assistance from nearby Bombardier workers pushed through a fence and blocked the attempted movement of a completed plane from a hangar.

The court ruling restricts workers from virtually any picket line activity whatsoever. It prohibits strikers from "interfering with, blocking, obstructing, or delaying in any way whatsoever, the entry of vehicles or people into the East Gate to the Bombardier and De Havilland facilities at Downsview Airport." It further states, "[I]nformational picketers cannot come within a radius of 20 metres of the East Gate turnstiles. As an exception, only once every five minutes, a single picketer may walk across the entrances and exits that make up the East Gate provided that the picketer does so walking continuously and completes crossing the entrances or exits within one minute."

In a move almost as outrageous as the court decision itself, Unifor meekly accepted the order following a pro forma denunciation of the ruling as "abominable."

Unifor's prostration before the courts should come as no surprise. Time and time again the courts have sided with employers and governments in outlawing worker job action against concessions and job cuts, and the union has invariably complied with their anti-worker diktats. Unifor boasts about being "the largest private sector union in

Canada." Yet it has never called for solidarity mobilizations and strikes on the part of Unifor's 300,000 members or any section of them in defiance of reactionary court rulings, let alone sought to mobilize other workers who have similarly been subjected to ruthless capitalist class justice.

The De Havilland injunction demonstrates once again that the courts are nothing more than a mechanism of class rule through which big business enforces its interests, while the unions defuse and smother the class struggle.

De Havilland is a holding of Longview Aviation Capital, an investment company owned by Sherry Brydson, a scion of Canada's richest family—the Thomsons—and the richest woman in the country. The company recently discontinued its formerly profitable Q400 Dash 8 turboprop as demand has dried up for the commuter jet. It has already laid off hundreds of workers at the Downsview plant. About 700 workers remain to finish already existing orders. The company has announced that it will not renew its lease at the Downsview complex when it expires later this year. Although no plans have been officially announced for relocation, the company has signaled it intends to relocate to Alberta to take advantage of lower wages and taxes, and wants to make the relocation rights contained in the collective agreement for the experienced workers all but impossible to realize.

Longview Aviation Capital also operates in Calgary, Alberta, and Victoria, British Columbia, and Unifor is the bargaining agent for the workers in both cities. However, Unifor is bitterly hostile to mobilizing these workers in opposition to De Havilland's cost-cutting drive, which will ultimately impact all of them if it succeeds. Instead, Unifor's orientation has been to beg Ontario's hard-right Doug Ford-led provincial government and Justin Trudeau's big business Liberal government to provide De Havilland's wealthy owners and investors with incentives to keep production in the Greater Toronto Area. This was the central message delivered by Unifor President Jerry Dias at a strike

rally last Tuesday, where workers' legitimate anxieties about losing their jobs were exploited by Unifor to bolster its appeals to Premier Ford to subsidize Longview's profits.

Unifor's division of workers by region and even worksite and its corporatist strategy of "defending jobs" by shilling for subsidies and tax breaks for De Havilland has even enabled Ford, a multimillionaire businessman and erstwhile Donald Trump enthusiast, to posture as a defender of the strikers. Ford, whose government has gutted labour standards and environmental regulations in the name of making "Ontario open for business," slashed public services and outlawed strikes by post-secondary school educators, cynically declared of De Havilland's relocation plans Tuesday, "They take the money and then they leave. I think it's disgusting. We have to fight."

The union is systematically isolating the De Havilland strikers. 1,500 Bombardier workers, also represented by Unifor, walked out at the same Downsview location and on the very same day, July 27. The two groups of workers were both under the Bombardier umbrella until 2019, when Bombardier violated commitments it had made to the union and to the government and sold the Dash 8 programme to De Havilland. Rather than seeking to unify the struggles of Bombardier and De Havilland workers, who confront essentially the same issues of deteriorating living standards and working conditions, Unifor succeeded in ramming through a rotten concessions deal for the Bombardier workers after five days on strike.

The contract ratification left the De Havilland workers in the lurch. Bombardier workers took deep concessions on wages. With inflation in Canada currently running at 3.7 percent year-over-year, the new contract provides for increases of only 0.5 percent in Year 1, 0.75 percent in Year 2 and one percent in Year 3—in effect a significant real-wage cut.

De Havilland workers should carefully consider the fact that Unifor's capitulation to the court injunction and appeals for the government to subsidize corporate profits are merely the latest examples of a four-decade-long process that has witnessed its transformation into a junior partner of the corporations. Last October, Unifor President Dias celebrated a government investment in Ford's Oakville Assembly plant—secured by imposing a new contract that further entrenches multi-tier wages and the use of temporary workers—by declaring alongside Premier Ford, Prime Minister Trudeau, and the CEO of Ford Canada that they were "all rowing in the same direction."

Opposing the corporate-union gang-up and defending all jobs at the Downsview site depends above all on De Havilland workers waging a political struggle against capitalist austerity and the anti-worker laws, including the

effective outlawing of the right to strike, imposed by all parties of the political establishment, from Ford's Tories to Trudeau's Liberals and the nominally "left" New Democrats.

To take up this fight, De Havilland workers must turn for support to the Canadian and international working class. They must demand that the tens of thousands of Unifor workers in the Greater Toronto Area be mobilized to actively participate in their struggle. This must be combined with an appeal to all 2,200 workers employed by Longview Aviation Capital across Canada to launch solidarity strike action to force the company to reinstate all laid-off workers, remove all threats of job losses, and revoke all concessions imposed in collaboration with Unifor in recent years.

Such a fight would draw on a well of sympathy among workers across Canada and internationally. The De Havilland strike is part of a mounting wave of struggles in recent months, involving tens of thousands of workers across Canada, the United States, and internationally. Many of these strikes have been aimed at reversing, at least in part, decades of rollbacks or at opposing further concessions; and many erupted in rebellion against union-endorsed sell-out tentative contracts. This was the true of the two-month-long strike waged by Vale miners in Sudbury and the month-long strike by Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia.

The unification of all these struggles into a worker-led counter-offensive for decent-paying, secure jobs and an end to capitalist austerity will be bitterly resisted at every step by Unifor and the entire trade union bureaucracy. This is why De Havilland workers, and their counterparts at worksites across Canada, must establish rank-and-file committees to take forward their fight independently of and in opposition to the pro-corporate and nationalist unions.



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