

For strike pay immediately at our full pay rate! Broaden the National Steel Car strike to win our demands!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
30 June 2023

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee (NSC-RFC) was recently established by workers at the company's rail car manufacturing plant in Hamilton, Ontario, to take control of the contract struggle out of the hands of the United Steelworkers (USW) bureaucracy. You can contact the NSC-RFC at nscrfc@gmail.com or by filling out the form at the end of this statement.

Brothers and Sisters:

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee salutes the majority of our co-workers who voted to reject the company's completely inadequate and quite frankly laughable, "best and final" contract offer. The contract rejection/strike vote shows that workers at NSC are prepared to fight and with the strike launched Thursday we have struck an important first blow. It is now imperative we build on that.

To do so we need to draw on the lessons of what has happened to date. To recap, we had a strike mandate vote that had the highest participation rate in recent memory (78.8 percent). There was overwhelming support for potential strike action. We were then slow walked by the company AND the USW bureaucracy into a last-minute "take it or leave it" offer last Friday night. We were then informed of this inadequate offer at a mass meeting on Sunday, June 25.

The angry denunciations of the NSC "offer" from the floor of that meeting proved that workers here are prepared to fight. All we got back from our organizational "braintrust" in the USW apparatus was fence-sitting on whether to accept provocative "offer" or take a stand to fight for workers' just demands. We certainly saw the USW District 6 rep do his best used-car salesman job on pushing through a deal. We then

had 48 hours to think it over and had the vote on Wednesday. A majority of workers voted it down in what was not only a rebuke to the company, but a slap in the face to the USW bureaucracy for its refusal to call for, let alone lead, a fight for our just demands.

We have now been informed of an 11th hour "offer" from NSC that adds one percentage point onto the first year's pay increase (an increase from 4 to 5 percent) and an insulting \$500 signing bonus, which will be subject to tax. This clearly shows that NSC's "last, best, and final offer" on Sunday was nothing but a bluff and a cheap trick and not a final offer at all! The fact that NSC presented its marginally improved offer just as the strike began shows a certain level of angst from NSC. It should also demonstrate, especially to those on the fence about this strike action, that we are in a powerful position. We can assume that NSC has a backlog of orders and needs us back to produce rail cars ASAP. Why else the belated bribe?

We can and must force the company onto the back foot to win much more, including inflation-busting pay increases, serious steps to tackle the horrendous safety record in the plant, and an end to two-tier pay and pensions. To do this, the NSC-RFC calls for the broadening of our struggle.

We send solidarity to the 1,400 workers at Wabtec in Erie, Pennsylvania, who are on strike against the locomotive manufacturer over similar issues less than 100 miles from the NSC plant and now face the threat of a scab-labour strikebreaking operation. We also send our support to the 7,400 dock workers scheduled to walk off the job along Canada's west coast Saturday to demand real pay increases and an end to contracting out.

All of these struggles and more must be unified through the building of rank-and-file committees like ours so we can coordinate our actions and prepare a joint counter-offensive of all workers for decent-paying, secure jobs, and against the ruling elite's agenda of austerity at home and war abroad.

We realize that the vote to reject the rotten tentative agreement produced a close result and sympathize with people on the knife edge, financially speaking. We have all been there. However, the NSC-RFC does not believe that the vote provided an accurate reflection of the level of opposition among NSC workers to the company's concessionary demands. If the USW had called explicitly for a "No" vote and put forward a proper strategy to win our strike, the "offer" would have been rejected overwhelmingly. We also know that the company and the union will now use the results of the ratification vote to intimidate and browbeat us into accepting the next rotten deal cooked up by NSC by asserting that support for the strike is not strong enough.

Now is the time for us in the rank and file to take the struggle into our own hands and out of the hands of the conciliatory bureaucrats in the USW. It is time for NSC workers to make a clean break from this tired organization and join the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee. We established the NSC-RFC to publicly declare opposition to the USW bureaucracy by advancing an alternative policy that rejects this union's nationalist and corporatist strategy.

As a first order of business, strike pay **MUST** be immediately increased to full pay; there is approximately \$850 million in the USW strike fund. We are the largest local in the city of Hamilton, which is a USW stronghold. This union has hundreds of thousands of members continent-wide who should be mobilized in support of our struggle. The fact that they give us such a minuscule amount of **OUR MONEY** shows their unserious nature in conducting a strike to win! The USW bureaucracy would rather starve us out to "get a deal" for expediency's sake than actually fight to win.

Furthermore, our stated demands remain firm:

- 10 percent wage increases from our "incentive" rate for each year in the three-year contract!
- Immediate reinstatement of the COLA clause!
- The end of piecework!

- \$20,000 limit on the benefit plan!

- An additional week vacation for those between 10 and 20 years service!

- The end of the two tier "training rate!" (We note that the USW tried to shoeshine us on that one last Sunday by giving NSC the "discretion" to "cease to apply the training rate at the conclusion of the probationary period to all probationary employees.")

- Rank-and-file oversight of contract negotiations, including live streaming so we all can see what's going on!

- Rank-and-file control over health and safety in the plant!

These demands are non-negotiable.

We know there is a Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee that was set up during the recent contract struggle in the US, when the Biden administration AND the various "union" bureaucracies shoved a sellout contract down workers' throats, including by conniving in the adoption of a law criminalizing any worker job action.

National Steel Car adds on to orders and builds cars to lease under the reporting mark of NSCX. We ask our American class brothers and sisters, if you're working in a switcher yard and you see that mark, put the car aside and let it rot! Don't let NSC scab on us and make money while we are out! We will build new and better ones with a better deal.

We will see you on the picket line. More importantly, why don't you join us in the struggle to mobilize workers' power? We can be reached at: nscrfc@gmail.com



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact