

National Steel Car strikers should forge solidarity with striking BC dockers and Wabtec workers! For a North America-wide working-class counter-offensive!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee

6 July 2023

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee is holding a public meeting this evening, Thursday, July 6, at 7pm eastern time to discuss how we can win our just demands. Workers can attend anonymously to protect themselves against reprisals by the company or union bureaucrats. Register here to attend. You can contact the committee at nscrfc@gmail.com.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We think it's crucial as our strike at National Steel Car's Hamilton, Ontario, rail car manufacturing plant enters its second week to discuss the importance of international class solidarity. Over 1,400 brothers and sisters are out on strike, and we sense a feeling of anxiety, alienation, even desperation, among some of us. That's understandable. The United Steelworkers (USW) bureaucracy hasn't done a lot, or frankly anything, to link our struggle to other workers' struggles near and far. On the contrary, they are doing all they can to keep us isolated so they can soften us up to accept a rotten sellout agreement cooked up with NSC management.

The union bureaucracy's behaviour is not shocking considering their nationalist and pro-company outlook. However, this committee does not view things the same way.

What is happening to the workers at National Steel Car—that is to say our rejection of the gunboat diplomacy of NSC's "final" offer and the USW bureaucracy's refusal to wage a militant struggle against our miserable and dangerous working conditions—is a small sample of an objective process going on all over North America and the world. Currently there are 1,500 workers at Wabtec in Erie, Pennsylvania, less than 100 miles from our plant, out on strike for many of the same reasons we are: better

pay, benefits, pensions, and working conditions. We know that our axle and truck shop uses brake parts made by Wabtec. Why has the USW not reached out in solidarity? Workers at Wabtec are our natural cross-border allies.

It should also be noted that dockworkers in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union walked out of ports in British Columbia on Saturday for many of the same reasons we did. The current federal Liberal government, being egged on by various pro-business and "free market" groups (Chambers of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, etc.) is undoubtedly preparing back-to-work legislation. This fact exposes the union bureaucracy, including the USW, since the unions have served as a key prop for Trudeau's government since 2015. The union-sponsored New Democrats have been in a "confidence-and-supply" agreement with Trudeau's Liberals for over a year.

US dockworkers on the west coast, who are in the same union as their Canadian counterparts, are in a similar position. There, workers have been without a contract for a year and now face US government intervention to block a potential strike. Despite US dockers being in the same union as their striking Canadian colleagues, the ILWU leadership on both sides of the border has worked to keep dock workers hermetically sealed off from each other along national lines.

So much for collective bargaining when the profits of corporate shareholders are threatened from below. It's all the more ironic when one considers our former USW International President, Leo Gerard, has just been named a Companion of the Order of Canada. This award is undoubtedly for services rendered to the corporations and the government by selling out rank-and-file USW

members over many years and promoting the trade war agenda of big business.

There are “NSCX” rail cars leased by Greg Aziz and NSC. This is one way Aziz keeps his profits rolling in while we’re on strike. We have yet to hear anything from the USW at the district, national, or international level about this. Why haven’t they demanded that the railroad unions show some solidarity and refuse to handle these cars? This would show some class solidarity and significantly strengthen our position against the company.

Within the next three months, United Parcel Service workers in the US could also be out on strike. This year, contracts are also up on both sides of the border for workers at the Detroit Three automakers. This is the first time in over two decades that auto contracts in the US and Canada have expired simultaneously. We hear nothing about this anywhere, especially not from the union bureaucracy, who never bring up the idea of joint cross-border strike action because they are bitterly hostile to internationalism.

In the autoworkers’ case, the nationalist outlook of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union and Unifor has made it impossible for joint action and enabled the automakers to pit workers against each other by threatening jobs cuts and plant closures. Never mind the ridiculous, and criminal, levels of corruption of UAW and Unifor bureaucrats.

Again, the issues facing workers in the auto industry are the same as ours at NSC. Low pay as it relates to the rate of inflation, underpaid tiers, benefit issues, poor working conditions, and pensions. We all ought to be fighting for this together as a class, regardless of artificial borders. This is all part and parcel of the global assault on workers’ standards of living and quality of life by the ruling elites, who want to subordinate society’s resources to waging imperialist war and protecting the wealth of the financial oligarchy.

We are not an island to ourselves. We have to understand the power of our position and reach out to build links in other industries and in other regions. Knowing that, we have to come to the conclusion that it is impossible for us to win what we need on our own. If our strike remains isolated, we will be starved out by the USW bureaucracy so long as we allow it to pay us the \$260 a week while the strike fund is between \$700 and \$800 million. Why are we allowing well-paid bureaucrats to decide for us what we need to win a strike?

The power is in the class we all belong to, the working class. This is a class the upper crust of union bureaucrats

do not belong to, no matter how many phrases about “solidarity” they utter. Most outside of the local level are in the top 10 percent of income earners and have a different outlook than ours.

We feel this may be why we do not see any attempt to broaden the struggle we are facing. Disruption of the profit system is against their class interests. An actual fight might expose their seeming inaction for what it is—an active betrayal of the rank-and-file. The last four decades have shown that they are more interested in developing corporatist relations with the capitalist ruling class (see Leo Gerard’s Order of Canada award) than conducting a fight for the workers they claim to represent.

The conclusion we must reach is that it is necessary to build this committee. The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee is affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which provides the political leadership and organizational framework to help coordinate our strike with Wabtec Locomotive workers, BC dock workers, and other sections of workers across Canada and the US. If we leave it up to those who talk a big game but never seem to follow through, this struggle will be lost by design. If we take the initiative, and fully understand the reality of what is going on with working people on a global basis, we can get what we need. We do not want to see one more worker injured, let alone killed, to make NSC more money off our hides.

We want the workers at NSC to know that this committee is not going away regardless of whatever happens. We did not set up the NSC-RFC to be a pressure group looking to win the next local election. We’ll leave that to those who want to climb the bureaucratic ladder in the USW. We’ll be here once this is settled to continue the fight to place decision-making power in the hands of rank-and-file workers where it belongs. Until then, we need to be laser focused on the task of winning what we need for a better life.



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