

Vote “No” on the NSC/USW tentative agreement! Mobilize working class support across North America for our strike!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
6 August 2023

Over 1,400 workers at the National Steel Car plant in Hamilton, Ontario, have been on strike since the end of June. They are demanding major pay increases to keep pace with inflation and an end to the horrendous safety record at the plant, which has claimed the lives of three workers on the job in as many years. Rank-and-file workers established the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee to seize control of their contract struggle from the United Steelworkers bureaucracy, which has refused throughout to wage any serious fight against the rail car manufacturer.

To join the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, email nscrfc@gmail.com.

Brothers and Sisters,

The United Steelworkers (USW) bureaucracy, working hand in hand with National Steel Car management, is trying to pull a fast one on us by presenting a new tentative agreement and forcing us to vote on it within 72 hours. Contrary to the rhetoric we heard at the mass meeting Saturday and upon further inspection, the deal should be rejected with a massive “No” vote on Tuesday.

The fact that some modest monetary gains are in the agreement proves that we, the workers, are in a powerful position to secure our demands for serious measures to improve workplace safety and an end to the super-exploitative piecework system.

To the extent we have seen any gains in the latest offer, this was only because we rebelled against the USW bureaucracy to launch the strike, which they tried to prevent. Immediately before we walked out, they presented us with a rotten sellout from Aziz, claiming that it was his “best and final” offer.

The union bureaucrats refused to give a

recommendation on how we should vote, leaving it to the initiative of the rank and file to launch the strike. This initiative must now be developed further through the building of the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee to broaden our strike to other sections of workers and force NSC management to its knees.

Don’t be fooled by that 6 percent pay increase in the first year, 4 percent in the second year, or the \$1,000 signing bonus. It looks good compared to the worthless offer we got in June, but at the end of the day, it’s still worthless. With inflation still running high, we still have no COLA, ensuring that our real wages would likely fall over the next three years under this agreement. In other words, the slight improvements are lipstick on a pig.

This “deal” does literally nothing to deal with National Steel Car’s horrific safety record or ending piecework. Both issues are interlinked, since the pressure to work at high speeds to meet management’s arbitrary targets encourages corners to be cut and lives to be put at risk. What’s more, we’re expected to do this with poorly maintained equipment in a facility that’s sorely lacking in safety protections.

We should also realize, considering the criminal nature of Greg Aziz, that he will be demanding his pound of flesh for making him give in on the meager “gains” we have made. Expect the piecework demands to become even harsher.

We have noticed that during this strike, the major issue—the elimination of piecework, that the current union executive supposedly wanted dealt with—simply vanished. We also noted the rapid way this deal has been put forward, right before the trial for the death of Quoc Le is about to begin next week. This is shameful

that three deaths seem to have been in vain and all over a couple of extra dollars. We point this out to remind everyone of the consequences of piecework on us and the complete disregard NSC has for our lives.

We fully understand that workers are weary of the strike, and this all seems to be a relief. What we are truly weary of is the fear of being made financially destitute and/or homeless. This would not be a problem if we had not been strung out on \$260 a week by the USW bureaucracy, which is sitting on a gargantuan \$850 million strike fund. We are also undoubtedly weary of all the politicians and union bureaucrats opportunistically parading in front of us while the union has no actual strategy to expand the strike and conduct it to win.

Again, getting a few extra bucks and not even getting our vacation pay in the bank BEFORE “negotiating” with NSC again isn’t a victory. All the back patting we see is simply a redux of the empty back patting after selling out CUPE education support workers last November. Bureaucrats and bureaucratic wannabes cheering themselves on. Kinda like USW National Director Marty Warren showing up at the picket line a few weeks ago and commiserating with us about how the cost of everything is going up. This is the same USW bureaucrat who makes close to \$200,000 a year off our dues and hasn’t missed out on a dime during this strike.

Our strike is taking place during the eruption of one of the largest strike waves in recent memory across this continent. Dockworkers in BC courageously stood up to their employers, but the ILWU union bureaucracy and the Liberal federal government conspired together to shut down their strike. Toronto grocery workers at Metro have struck over low pay while big grocery chains make record profits. Wabtec workers in Erie, Pennsylvania, are still out on strike while the company brings scabs in. UPS workers are seeing the greed of the company and treachery of the Teamsters as they vote on the sellout deal concocted by their union to prevent a strike by over 340,000 workers.

And then there is the looming strike by autoworkers that could happen on both sides of the US-Canada border next month simultaneously for the first time in years.

The issue with our strike and the others mentioned is that they have not been linked together collectively,

instead being deliberately siloed by the respective union bureaucracies representing those workers. This is why our “gains” are so minimal. The USW has made a conscious effort to keep us isolated, thereby minimizing our power as workers from a continentwide, easily connected and coordinated struggle to fight back! This is what we have been warning about, and the USW is running this playbook to a “T.”

The only way to truly win this struggle is to assert our independent class interests by linking these strikes and struggles together. This has to be done by breaking free from the yoke of the USW bureaucracy’s pro-corporate agenda, unifying our strike with other class struggles on the continent into a worker-led counteroffensive against the ruling elite’s class war agenda.

No mistake should be made that Greg Aziz is waging class war against us. Let’s push back not only against the criminality of National Steel Car but against the treachery of the USW bureaucracy as well, which is doing Aziz’s bidding. The only way to do this properly is to join the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, which is part of a global network, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), that is fighting to unify all of our struggles. A decisive “No” vote Tuesday will mark a critical next step in this fight, provided we seize on the rejection of the tentative agreement to broaden our strike to workers across North America.



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