

# Unite Canadian, US and Mexican autoworkers in a joint fight against the Detroit Three! Build rank-and-file committees to seize control from the Unifor bureaucracy!

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter  
12 September 2023

*Join the next online meeting of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to discuss the latest developments in the contract fight and the rank-and-file strategy for workers to win their demands. Register [here](#) to attend.*

*For information on joining a rank-and-file committee to organize a fight against concessions, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.*

Contracts expire on September 18 for 18,000 Canadian autoworkers employed by the Detroit Three automakers. Four days earlier, contracts will also expire for 150,000 American autoworkers. The urgent task facing autoworkers at Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis operations in Canada is to unify their fight for wage increases, job protections, and improvements in working conditions with their American colleagues by seizing control of their contract battle from the nationalist, pro-corporate Unifor bureaucracy.

To do so, workers should build rank-and-file committees in every plant to place control over their struggle in the hands of workers on the shop floor. These committees should make immediate preparations for a strike at the Detroit Three's operations in line with the massive strike mandate given by workers last month. By linking up with the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network already established with the support of committees at several US plants, Canadian autoworkers can develop a joint struggle with their class brothers and sisters south of the border.

The committees should spearhead the fight for the immediate abolition of the hated multi-tier wage system, which was agreed to and has been further entrenched by the Unifor bureaucracy over the past decade-and-a-half, and for genuine rank-and-file worker supervision of all negotiations. The rank-and-file committees should also demand job protections and guaranteed full pay during the electric vehicle transition, which the profit-hungry automakers are using to carry out a global onslaught on wages and conditions.

The fight for these demands and opposition to all concessions require the uniting of Canadian autoworkers with their fellow workers in Mexico and the United States in a political class struggle against the assault on autoworkers' wages and conditions that the auto giants are implementing with the full backing of the Biden, Trudeau, and Doug Ford-led Ontario governments.

## Stop the EV jobs bloodbath!

The auto corporations view the EV transition as an opportunity to

completely restructure the workforce and multiply their profits. Corporate executives and billionaire investors have touted the estimated 40 percent reduction in workers needed to produce EVs. The job slaughter will be used to extort concessions, pitting workers against each other in different countries and different plants, so as to impose poverty wages, speed-up, and an ever larger proportion of multi-tier and temporary workers. This process is being backed by governments in all major auto-producing countries to the tune of tens of billions of dollars. In Canada alone, the federal and Ontario governments have committed to providing \$30 billion in recent months to just two automakers, Volkswagen and Stellantis.

The Canadian and US governments view the imposition of the EV transition at the expense of the working class as a key strategic question. North America's twin imperialist powers want to corner the lion's share of this rapidly growing economic sector for themselves against their great power rivals, above all China and the European imperialist powers. To this end, they are not only backing the automakers' onslaught on jobs and conditions, but also promoting economic protectionism and the "friendshoring" of the supply and processing of the critical raw materials needed to produce EV and high-tech weapons and weapon-systems. These steps are seen by the ruling class as essential for the continuation of their imperialist wars around the world, first and foremost the US-led war on Russia, in which Canada is playing a leading role. The autoworkers' struggle must therefore necessarily be connected with the development of mass opposition in the working class to imperialist war.

Stepped in nationalism and corporatism, the Unifor and United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracies are organically incapable of resisting the automakers' global onslaught. Over the past four decades, they have been fully integrated as junior partners of the auto bosses and the state, helping to implement round after round of concessions, job cuts, and plant closures on autoworkers.

## Oppose Unifor's pro-management nationalist and corporatist strategy

When Unifor negotiated the last round of sellout contracts with the auto companies in 2020, disgraced former president Jerry Dias pushed for three-year agreements so the expiration of Canadian autoworkers' contracts would be synchronized with those of their US colleagues. This was not done to facilitate a joint struggle with American autoworkers, but to better position Unifor to compete with its American UAW rival for product

placements.

New Unifor President Lana Payne has continued and deepened this nationalist and pro-corporate course. In a slickly produced 4-minute video on the auto talks under the slogan “charting our own course,” Payne fulsomely praised the 1985 split from the United Autoworkers by its Canadian section to establish the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Unifor’s predecessor. The split marked a significant step forward, according to Payne, because “we couldn’t operate in the shadow or at the direction of the United States.”

A more explicit articulation of the foul Canadian nationalism that underlay the 1985 split would hardly be possible. In the world of well-paid bureaucrats occupied by Payne, the main enemy is autoworkers in the United States, not the globally operating auto corporations. The Unifor bureaucrats, like their UAW counterparts, are viciously hostile to the idea of a united struggle by autoworkers across North America against the global restructuring plans of the auto companies because such a movement would cut across their friendly “partnership” with the Detroit Three, which rests on the defence of nationalism, corporate bribery, and close cooperation between auto executives, union bureaucrats, and the government.

While this strategy has proven lucrative for the union bureaucracy, workers have experienced one defeat after another in contract talks over the past four decades. The CAW and Unifor, which was established in 2013, has presided over the decimation of jobs in the auto industry, the introduction of two-tier regimes after the 2008 financial crisis, the dismantling of company healthcare and pension plans, and a dramatic expansion of subcontracting and temporary employment. Of the 18,000 Unifor members on the payrolls of the Detroit Three, more than 2,200 or close to 12.5 percent are temporary workers.

Unifor and the rest of the union bureaucracy have at the same time deepened their tripartite alliance with big business and the New Democratic Party-supported Trudeau Liberal government. This alliance—which is aimed at suppressing the class struggle and ensuring the “global competitiveness,” i.e. profitability of Canadian capitalism—is being strengthened under conditions of rampant social inequality and the Canadian ruling elite’s war on Russia and preparations to join a US-instigated war China. The mad scramble for the scarce resources required for EV production is part and parcel of this struggle by American and Canadian imperialism to preserve their economic and military dominance.

### **Abolish the Unifor bureaucracy! Build rank-and-file committees!**

Workers are increasingly searching for a new political perspective and a way out of these corrupt pro-capitalist organizations. Payne and UAW President Shawn Fain offer no way forward in this fight. They were both brought to power with the aim of rescuing their respective bureaucracies from massive corruption scandals that saw the jailing of several former UAW presidents and the downfall of former Unifor president Jerry Dias for taking kickbacks to market COVID PPE to employers. These scandals were not aberrations but arose out of the bureaucracy’s role as junior partners of the corporations and the state.

Fain, a long-time bureaucrat, was catapulted into the UAW leadership in an election set up by the White House Department of Labor. Following a deliberate campaign of vote suppression by the bureaucracy that resulted in a mere 9 percent of UAW members casting a ballot, Fain was elected with the votes of just 3 percent of rank-and-file workers. Within weeks of Fain’s Unite All Workers for Democracy and Democratic Socialists of America-backed administration assuming control of the UAW apparatus, it sold out a 40-day strike of battery manufacturing workers at Clarios in

Ohio. For her part, Payne recently orchestrated the sellout of 3,500 Metro grocery workers, who were forced to accept real-terms pay cuts and the expansion of part-time employment after being starved out and isolated on the picket line by Unifor for five weeks.

Aware of the militancy among rank-and-file workers, Fain has postured as a fighter ready to take radical measures. The cynicism of this pose is exposed not only by his own record as a long-term senior UAW bureaucrat, but by the recent remarks of US President Joe Biden, who blurted out that he did not think there would be a strike in the US after September 14. This remark is informed by the UAW’s political support for and close collaboration with the Biden administration, which like Trudeau uses the union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle, while retaining the option to criminalize strikes should the unions prove unable to rein in the rank-and-file.

Opposition to the US government-backed installation of Fain as the UAW’s new face came from rank-and-file Mack Truck autoworker Will Lehman, who with the support of the *World Socialist Web Site* ran in the election for UAW president. Lehman called for the abolition of the UAW apparatus—stressing that it cannot be “reformed” or pressured into upholding workers’ interests—and the placing of power back in the hands of workers on the shop floor through the building of rank-and-file committees. He openly campaigned as a socialist, winning almost 5,000 votes under conditions in which the UAW bureaucracy used patently illegal methods to prevent autoworkers from learning about his campaign or even the election itself. Lehman repeatedly stressed the necessity of unifying autoworkers internationally in struggle—an appeal that Canadian autoworkers must answer in the current contract struggle by building their own rank-and-file committees.

### **Mobilize North American autoworkers with an internationalist and socialist program**

Autoworkers in the United States have initiated this process by forming the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network. Committees built at the Canadian operations of Ford, GM and Stellantis should affiliate with this network and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which fights for an international strike of North American autoworkers to overturn all concessions and prevent the EV transition from taking place at the expense of autoworkers. The technological advances bound up with EV production could be used to reduce punishing working weeks for all workers with no loss of pay. But this raises the question of which class will control this technology and how it will be organized: the capitalists with their nationalist divide-and-conquer strategy in pursuit of ever-greater corporate profits; or the working class with an international program to place the auto industry under democratic control to meet the basic social needs of all workers.

Such a transformation is possible only if autoworkers make their struggle the catalyst for an independent political movement of the working class against the profit system, which subordinates all areas of social life to the accumulation of vast quantities of wealth by the super-rich elite. This movement must be built in direct opposition to the Liberal/NDP/trade union alliance, of which Unifor is a key player, and the rotten Canadian nationalism peddled by the union bureaucracy. This entails the adoption of a socialist and internationalist program by autoworkers and the working class as a whole.

Conditions have never been more favourable for the victory of a rank-and-file rebellion against both the union bureaucracy and the corporations. Explosive confrontations all over the world between workers on one side and the union apparatuses, corporations and capitalist state on the other

are reaching a fever pitch. The task before autoworkers in Canada, the United States and Mexico is to make these objective developments the basis of a conscious strategy guided by the independent political mobilization of the working class in a counter-offensive for decent-paying, secure jobs for all and an end to austerity and war. A powerful cross-border strike beginning September 14 in the US and September 18 in Canada will mark an important step forward in this struggle. We urge all autoworkers who wish to take up this fight by building a rank-and-file committee at your workplace to contact us by filling out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**