

For rank-and-file control of the National Steel Car contract struggle! International class unity, not a nationalist corporate/union partnership!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
6 May 2026

To contact the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form at the end of this article, or write to nscrfc@gmail.com.

Brothers and Sisters,

We are now approximately three months away from the expiry of our contract with National Steel Car on August 8, 2026. Under conditions of the ongoing war on Iran that is having a devastating global economic impact, and the trade war between the US and Canada that has hit our facility here in Hamilton, Ontario, for over a year now, Management's clear goal is to offload the crisis onto our backs through real wage cuts and continued job insecurity.

Trump's criminal imperialist war against Iran is hammering us and other workers across Canada and around the world with price rises and the disruption of economic activity. The sharp increases in energy costs since the war began directly affect steel and aluminum production and reduce demand for manufactured goods. We're already struggling with the consequences of the trade war launched by Trump last year and further fuelled by the response of the Canadian ruling class, which adopted counter-tariffs and worked with the union top brass to whip up a foul nationalist campaign to divide us from our class brothers in the US. Always eager to defend his profits, even at the expense of workers' lives, National Steel Car owner Greg Aziz wants to exploit the crisis to impose another round of massive concessions on us.

But the impact of the war and trade war can work in our favour, because it is creating the conditions for a broader movement of the working class against dangerous working conditions, wage cutting and the subordination of society's needs to the accumulation of corporate profits. As we begin our contract fight, we must recognize that our struggle can and must win broader support among workers across Canada and in the US. After all, the issues we're fighting over—a safe workplace, decent pay, secure jobs—are the same issues on the minds of millions of workers as governments and corporate executives around the globe wage a class war to defend the wealth of the financial oligarchy and free up resources for wars of aggression in a new redivision of the world.

In the last 60 days there have been several deliberate provocations by National Steel Car indicating what their intentions are going into negotiations with USW Local 7135. On March 17, the company announced the plant would have its summer shutdown for three weeks from Tuesday, June 30, 2026 to Monday, July 20, 2026. Since that

announcement, there has been some wrangling over contract language regarding weeks of vacations, Authorized Time Off and single vacation days. This has resulted in the decision by NSC to make July 2nd and 3rd "temporary layoff" days (while work will undoubtedly be on the floor!) and have the official shutdown be the first full two weeks of July (July 5 -11 and July 12 - 18).

Our vacation pay will now be paid out June 30, 2026. Not only is this the earliest we have ever seen a summer shutdown, but also one of the first times it will last for much of the month of July. Typically, the shutdown is the two weeks encompassing the last week of July and the first week of August. The timing here is clear. Under the guise of giving you a wonderful vacation in the middle of July, National Steel Car intends to drain your bank account for the better part of a month before voting on a collective agreement that expires on August 8. The obvious hope of Mr. Aziz and National Steel Car is that through this maneuver they can force us to submit to a terrible contract—one that will work out great for him and allow him to get back at us for rejecting his original terrible "offer" in 2023.

For their part, the union executive seems to be more interested in scrupulously following the "collective bargaining" rules, even though they are stacked in favour of the employer, as they relate to the run up to these negotiations. It needs to be said that this was the USW's viewpoint in dealing with the industrial murders of Fraser Cowan, Colin Grayley, and Quoc Le. The USW insisted that all we could do was pursue legal action through the courts, with the result that court decisions allowed National Steel Car to pay a grand total of \$650,000 for the death of three of our colleagues.

It's already clear that the USW bureaucrats intend to use the negotiations coming up to impose real wage cuts on us as prices for food, energy and all other basic necessities skyrocket. In the January newsletter, the union president let slip more than he wanted to regarding negotiating "the Steelworker way." In the "Presidents Message," he stated,

"We also look back on employee hours worked and wages earned, cost of living increase, and, the Consumer Price Index of Canada. We research the future of the rail car industry to see where it's going. This is where we prepare the Monitory (sic) portion of our proposal."

What does this dry and somewhat technocratic language actually mean for us? The USW will bargain on wage increases of between 2 to 2.5 percent over the life of a contract in line with the consumer

price index. They attempted to shoe shine us in 2023 with something similar to this until workers stood up at the mass meeting we had in June of that year to correctly push back. They will attempt to do this again unless the rank and file takes the struggle into its own hands.

According to Statistics Canada, the Consumer Price Index national inflation number for March was 2.4 percent. This spike in prices was undoubtedly due to the illegal war the fascist criminal in the White House and his Zionist friends in Tel Aviv have launched against Iran. But this is only the beginning of the price rises we'll see in coming months. The war's disastrous impact on the global economy would have barely shown up in the March figures, since the war began on February 28.

The CPI generally excludes the price of fuel (gas) and food inflation. According to the Bank of Canada, food inflation alone is sitting at 4.4 percent for March and is expected to increase between 4 and 6 percent for the rest of 2026. Canada's Food Price Report 2026 from Dalhousie University says that the average family of four can expect to pay \$17,571.79 for on groceries for the year! And you haven't put a drop of gas in your car yet! The average worker at National Steel Car makes between \$60,000 and \$70,000 a year in a dangerous work environment. Almost one quarter of that is going to be eaten up just to feed your family and the inflation created by the war in Iran has only started to reveal itself.

The union called a "Town Hall Meeting" for last Sunday, May 3. Underscoring the lack of confidence workers have in the USW leadership, just over 100 workers, that is a mere 10 percent of the currently employed workforce, bothered to attend. The major topic of discussion was the incentive/piecework issue, which the union claims it wants to get rid of. Yet the Steelworkers' bureaucracy is organically incapable of advancing an effective and persuasive strategy to get rid of piecework, because it remains wholeheartedly committed to capitalist private property and the "profitability" of National Steel Car to fill the pockets of Greg Aziz and company executives.

We are convinced that the piece-work system is a menace to all of us. It pits one worker against the other, is a method of wage theft for NSC, and most importantly, is the ultimate reason behind the three unnecessary and tragic deaths at NSC between September of 2020 and June of 2022. In short, it needs to be done away with ASAP, and this is a demand our committee has raised since its foundation.

But the union is framing the discussion entirely from the standpoint of retaining the current conditions of brutal exploitation with some cosmetic alterations. For example, they say that to do away with piecework, workers who currently achieve the piecework targets should accept a modest reduction in their overall pay. They say that overall, workers will be better off because they will receive this sum consistently over 12 months, rather than having some months at even lower pay as is currently the case when they don't meet the piecework targets.

We disagree with the idea that workers must beg for crumbs. This company is a profitable concern and must be forced to pay workers a decent wage and provide safe working conditions.

We argue for the abolition of piecework, not from the standpoint of proposing lower total take-home pay for workers that is more "sustainably" spread out throughout the year. Rather, we demand the ending of all speed-up pressures in the plant and a pay raise of at least 25 percent across the board to offset decades of real wage cuts and create the conditions where we can work safely without having to risk our lives to make ends meet.

The USW leaders won't fight for this. As far as they are concerned,

preserving the "bargaining" framework and their "partnership" with the bosses takes priority over waging a genuine struggle for our interests. And this isn't only true of our local, but the union bureaucracy as a whole. Their DNA is nationalist and pro-capitalist, so they want to uphold corporate profitability and "Team Canada" alongside their pals in the corporate boardrooms and government ministries at all costs.

A good example of this is given by the joint statement issued earlier last month by USW Canada President Marty Warren and Unifor President Lana Payne. They called on the Carney Liberal government to implement an "industrial strategy" aimed at "safeguarding our industrial economy," including "strategic sectors" like "aerospace and defence" and "critical minerals." Leaving no doubt about what this "industrial strategy" would seek for Canadian imperialism, their statement went on to call for a protectionist "buy Canadian" policy to help "leverage" Canada's "strengths while addressing other external threats."

The heads of the country's two largest industrial unions, urged Ottawa to "flex market muscle," against the US, and diversify "export markets while enforcing trade rules against unfair practices—particularly from China." Emphasizing their support for the Canadian ruling class's trade war with the US, they added, "Standing up to one source of economic coercion while ignoring another will not protect our industrial economy."

National Steel Car Workers and workers throughout all manufacturing sectors have no interest in being dragooned into Canadian imperialism's trade wars and military conflicts.

The USW and Unifor's denunciation of Chinese workers is especially disgusting in this regard, because China is the target of war preparations on the part of the US and Canadian governments. Our allies in the fight for good-paying, secure jobs, affordable food and energy prices and a contract that guarantees safe working conditions are the workers labouring under the same conditions as us across the United States and Mexico, as well as the super-exploited Chinese workers, who serve as a benchmark to which the corporate elites here want to reduce us to.

All of this underscores what the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee has been saying all along. A nationalist, pro-capitalist approach based on supporting employer profitability ("competitiveness" and "market share"), can only lead to more concessions, job cuts and speed-up. Production today is now an international process, and the counteroffensive of rank-and-file workers must reflect that reality.

Additionally, we must no longer subordinate ourselves to a "bargaining" framework that is designed, not to protect us, but to protect the ruling class and its profit centres and keep us under the thumb of organized labour bureaucracies, who act like an industrial police force for the employers they claim to protect us from. What we need is the independent organization and mobilization of the international working class in rank-and-file committees like ours as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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