National Steel Car workers: Reject the corporate/USW “partnership!” Prepare strike action under rank-and-file control!

Take the contract struggle into your own hands!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
7 August 2026

Some 1,400 workers at the National Steel Car plant in Hamilton, Ontario, manufacture rail cars for customers across North America. The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee prepared the following statement ahead of the contract expiration this Saturday, August 8. To contact the committee, fill out the form at the end of the statement.

Brothers and Sisters,

As our shift ended on Friday, the company handed out its “last, best, and final offer” to us just hours before our contract expires Saturday, August 8. The union had already called a “Town Hall Meeting” for August 9, where the offer will be discussed, before we vote on it on Tuesday.

We must respond to this ambush by rejecting the miserable offer and preparing for a genuine struggle for our demands under rank-and-file control.

The offer includes a pathetic 3 percent wage increase in year one and 2 percent in each of the following two years, falling well short of even the consumer price index. New language in the letter of understanding reinforces the exploitative “incentive” system and they’re offering a $3,000 increase in life insurance payouts if you die on the job, which as we know only too well is a real possibility in this plant.

The company put out this offer over the heads of the USW negotiating team, but it must be said that the union bureaucracy has allowed management to behave with such brazen arrogance by systematically blocking our struggle. During the last contract fight in 2023, the USW gave no recommendation on the first sellout agreement and the strike only went ahead because we rebelled against the leadership. There will be no genuine struggle for our interests this time around either unless the rank and file fights for one. Whatever the USW bureaucrats tell us at Sunday’s meeting, we must demand a strike authorization vote and prepare to broaden our struggle for decent pay and safe working conditions to other sections of the working class.

The centrepiece of USW Local 7135’s 2026 contract campaign—the elimination of the “incentive” program,” i.e., piecework—has evaporated over the last two weeks. The union now proposes to get involved in administering the piecework program rather than abolish it. Piecework is wage theft, pits worker against worker, and is the root cause of the deaths of Fraser Cowan, Collin Grayley and Quoc Le.

The USW’s abandonment of the fight to end piecework is the logical endpoint for an organization that accepts capitalism and the collective bargaining framework as unalterable. The USW is not a union in any meaningful sense of the word. It is a business whose officials earn management-level salaries and sit on over $2 billion in assets—assets they protect by ensuring workers’ struggles remain safely confined within a bargaining system designed from top to bottom to protect the bosses and the union bureaucrats’ corporatist partnership.

We saw this after the deaths of our three coworkers. The USW insisted the proper channel for redress was through the courts. The result: $650,000 in fines for three lives—the cost of one shift of production. The union “guided us through the process,” as the local president put it, and the process delivered exactly what it was built to deliver: impunity for NSC owner Greg Aziz, a convicted criminal who stole our vacation pay during the 2023 strike and once called us “maggots in his wallet.”

The union’s supposed fight against piecework consisted of an arbitration challenge through the grievance procedure. This was a shot in the dark that failed because the collective agreement previously negotiated and sold to us by the USW explicitly grants the company the right to set incentive rates. A letter of understanding on page 85 of the agreement states, “The continuance of the incentive plan and the Company’s agreement regarding the right of review of the Company’s decision on making incentive will be grievable, but, no other aspect of the plan will be grievable which includes the Company’s right to set incentive rates.” On this basis, the arbitrator decided they had no jurisdiction.

The union promptly folded. Not because the fight was unwinnable, but because waging it would have demanded challenging the pro-employer collective bargaining framework that generates the bureaucrats' privileges. It is this framework the Liberal government is currently using to gut the right to strike of all workers. Over the past three years, they have used the anti-democratic provisions of the Canada Labour Code—invoking a cooked-up "reinterpretation" of its Section 107—to illegalize 10 strikes without so much as a single parliamentary vote. And now the Carney Liberal government has launched a "review" of the Labour Code to give themselves even greater arbitrary strikebreaking powers.

For three years, the USW said next to nothing about piecework. Only at a sparsely attended town hall meeting this May did they reveal their "plan"—a half measure of establishing a $32 an hour wage rate which would mean a wage-cut for many welders and, consequently, divided the membership and demobilized the shop floor.

A real fighting organization would have spent those years educating the membership: your incentive wage **IS** your wage, and Greg Aziz deliberately withholds $5 to $7 an hour to make you dance to his tune. A real fighting organization would have built the confidence to demand that negotiations start with an end to all piecework and a $35 an hour starting wage for all, with further increases in the coming contract to be added on top of that.

The union's proposal to get involved in administering piecework—sitting in on the profit motive of National Steel Car—is the most brazen kind of corporatism. It is the same arrangement that IG Metall bureaucrats in Germany boast about as they sit on corporate boards while presiding over mass job cuts and the destruction of workers' rights, including recently at Volkswagen. The union executive is serving as an enforcement arm of the company, protecting Aziz's profits while calling it a "partnership."

Our struggle to secure decent pay for all the work we do, without having to risk our health and very lives for extra "incentives," parallels developments throughout the working class. WestJet flight attendants walked out a few days ago to demand an end to unpaid labour. Autoworkers are in the midst of contract talks that Unifor is using to deepen its collaboration with the Detroit Three's executives, while offering the rank and file more insecurity and multi-tier wages.

The onslaught on workers' living standards, conditions, and the very right to strike is supported by the entire ruling class because they want us to pay for their wars and enriching the wealthy oligarchy. Trump's criminal war on Iran is driving up food and energy prices. The US-Canada trade war is hammering manufacturing. Governments are demanding workers pay for military escalation through cuts to public services and attacks on the right to strike. Across North America, workers face the same onslaught on wages, conditions and jobs.

We say that the attacks on workers across the continent provide the basis for broadening our struggle into an industrial and political counteroffensive, linking up with workers in auto, steel, logistics and beyond through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. This fact is underscored by the growing rebellion among industrial and other workers across the US, finding its most conscious expression in the candidacy of socialist autoworker Will Lehman for the presidency of the UAW.

The USW will never lead that fight. While it calls itself an "international" union, it does nothing to mobilize its own members in the US and Canada, let alone the working class, in joint struggle. Its nationalism—from "Buy America" and "Buy Canadian," to "Team Canada" tariffs—chains us to our own ruling class and divides us from our brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and around the world. Its corporatism subordinates our needs to the "competitiveness" of the bosses who exploit us.

This Rank-and-File Committee fights for a different program. Urgent preparations for a strike as the starting point of a genuine struggle for our demands once we repudiate the rotten contract offer brought back by the USW must be made. We should fight for:

1. End piecework immediately. Wages start at the current incentive rate for all departments with no reduction in take-home pay. Worker control over safety and production—our lives come before Aziz's profits.
2. A 25 percent wage increase over the life of the contract to offset decades of real wage cuts and the inflation driven by war and corporate price gouging.
3. Strike pay at $750 a week, immediately. The USW sits on over $2 billion in assets and an $850 million strike fund. It's our money.

The only way forward is to take the struggle into our own hands and broaden it to other sections of workers under similar attack—to build the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee as an organization of independent working-class power and class struggle.

We are not just in a contract struggle over wages and benefits. We are in a political struggle over who controls society's resources, and our basic democratic and social rights. It's clear the USW apparatus is on the bosses' side. Now it's our turn to put forward an alternative against worker-exploitation, capitalist austerity, union-business-government corporatism and war.

Join the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee. Contact us at nscrfc@gmail.com or by filling out the form below. We want to hear from you.

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