

Turn the National Steel Car strike into a counter-offensive by workers across North America: For class struggle, not trade war

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

More than 1,200 workers at National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario—the largest railway freight car manufacturer in North America—walked off the job on August 12 after 858 of 1,092 workers voted to reject the company’s “last, best, and final offer.” The strike, the second at the plant in three years, is centered on abolishing the piecework “incentive program,” which was a major factor in the deaths of Fraser Cowan, Collin Grayley and Quoc Le between 2020 and 2022.

The United Steelworkers bureaucracy is isolating the strike, starving workers on \$425-a-week strike pay and preparing another sellout like it did in 2023. The following statement was issued by the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee (NSCRFC), formed during the last walkout, calling on workers to take control of the strike and mobilize workers across North America in a common fight.

Brothers and sisters,

By decisively rejecting National Steel Car’s “best and final offer,” with 858 of 1,092 voting no, we declared that we will not be pushed around. The decisive question two weeks into the strike is whether we organize ourselves to win or allow the United Steelworkers bureaucracy to fritter away our strength until we are starved into accepting another sellout.

Workers throughout Hamilton and across North America face the same attacks on jobs, wages and conditions. Our strike can become the starting point for a common fight, but only if we break the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracy.

The USW has a strategy for defeat, not victory

We do not have to guess what the USW intends to do—we saw it in 2023. It isolated our strike for 41 days, forced us to survive on \$260 a week while National Steel Car cut off our health benefits and withheld vacation pay, and then gave us only 72 hours to vote on a contract that left piecework intact. The same apparatus is following the same playbook now: wear us down financially, block the mobilization of our allies and present

whatever sellout owner Greg Aziz offers as a victory.

If we wait for the negotiating committee to get a phone call from the representatives of Aziz—who was indicted in 2013 on charges of securities fraud against the Alabama state employee retirement program, later cutting a deal to have the charges dropped—we will be sold out.

Two weeks into this strike, the membership still has no idea what the union proposed on wages, benefits or virtually anything else. The one thing we do know is damning: the Local 7135 executive went into bargaining prepared to collaborate with National Steel Car in administering the piecework system. Frank Crowder denounces the “incentive plan” for the cameras while concealing his local’s offer to help Greg Aziz run it.

The union hides behind the company’s refusal to bargain and postures as “ready to bargain.” Its only strategy is to wait for management to call the negotiating committee after workers have been starved on \$425 a week, undoubtedly with another sellout contract in hand.

Meanwhile, the USW has paraded union officials and NDP politicians before the cameras. Ontario NDP leader Marit Stiles used her visit to call on Premier Doug Ford to “buy Ontario steel.” The same nationalist program is promoted by Prime Minister Mark Carney and President Donald Trump.

To defend our jobs and living standards, we have to unite workers across Canada, the US and Mexico. Our enemy is not our class brothers and sisters across the border but the corporate executives, politicians and union bureaucrats who are demanding that workers pay for their trade wars and militarism.

“Buy Canadian” and “Buy American” politics subordinate workers on each side of the border to their own corporations and governments. The corporations use the trade war to threaten jobs and demand concessions in the name of staying competitive, while the union bureaucracies prevent workers from mobilizing their common strength.

Take control of the strike and break the isolation

Preventing a sellout requires expanding the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee throughout the plant, with representatives from every department and shift. Regular mass meetings must decide the strategy and tactics of the strike, rather than merely receiving reports on decisions made behind closed doors.

The membership must elect its own negotiating committee from the rank and file, answerable to the workers and not the bureaucracy, and all company and union proposals must be disclosed to the membership. No agreement should be brought to a vote until workers have had ample time to study and discuss the complete contract.

The committee must send delegations to other plants, picket lines and rail yards in Canada and the United States to organize common action. The bureaucracy will not do this for us. We must build the connections ourselves.

Railroad workers throughout North America are among our most powerful allies. Greg Aziz has workers build additional cars at the end of customer orders for National Steel Car's own leasing fleet. These cars, marked NSCX, allow Aziz to continue making money while we remain on strike.

We call directly on railroad workers in Canada and the United States: set aside every NSCX car and leave it empty. Do not handle it. Do not move it. Organize rank-and-file committees to enforce this action independently of the BLET, SMART-TD and other union bureaucracies. This would revive the tradition of Eugene Debs and the American Railway Union, which halted the movement of Pullman cars in 1894.

Rail workers know the cost of leaving their struggles in the hands of the apparatus. The US government outlawed a national rail strike in 2022, while CPKC signal workers who rejected a company offer by 89.2 percent were sent back to work through binding arbitration accepted by the IBEW bureaucracy.

Some 23,000 USW members at US Steel and Cleveland-Cliffs in the United States are also approaching a September 1 contract expiration. We appeal directly to them and to workers at ArcelorMittal Dofasco and Cleveland-Cliffs' Stelco operations in the Hamilton area: form rank-and-file committees, exchange delegations, hold joint mass meetings and prepare common industrial action.

Workers in Canada, the United States and Mexico confront the same corporations, politicians and union bureaucracies. Our strength lies in uniting across national and union boundaries against them: class war, not trade war.

Our demands

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee advances the following non-negotiable demands:

A 25 percent wage increase. This must recover the losses produced by years of 2 to 2.5 percent settlements and the inflation fueled by trade war and the war with Iran.

Immediate abolition of the "incentive plan" without a pay cut. The day rate in every department must begin from the existing incentive rate. The piecework system has cost lives, stolen wages and pitted worker against worker.

An immediate \$5,000 increase in the benefit plan, raising the limit to \$20,000. Coverage must include prescriptions, dental care and hospitalization, with additional coverage for vision care, orthodontics and orthotics.

Increased paid vacation for seniority workers. Waiting ten years between the fourth and fifth week of vacation must end. The schedule must be:

Ten years but less than fifteen: four weeks (8 percent)

Fifteen years but less than twenty: five weeks (10 percent)

- Twenty years but less than twenty-five: six weeks (12 percent)

- Twenty-five years but less than thirty: seven weeks (14 percent)

Worker control over safety and the pace of work. Replace the Joint Health and Safety Committee with an elected rank-and-file body empowered to halt production until conditions are safe.

Double strike pay to \$850 a week. The USW's \$850 million strike and defence fund and more than \$2 billion in assets come from the membership and must be used to sustain the strike.

The strike is ours to win

The USW bureaucracy will not carry out this program. Its realization depends on workers organizing independently through the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee. Join the committee, build it in every department and shift, and organize the common action needed to win.



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