For a joint struggle of National Steel Car strikers with Stelco and US steelworkers against layoffs, dangerous working conditions!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
2 October 2026

Are you a worker at National Steel Car, Stelco, Stellantis or in the US steel industry? Join the rank-and-file fightback by filling out the form at the end of this article.

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Brothers and Sisters,

As of this writing, we are now in our 8th week on strike at National Steel Car with the United Steelworkers (USW) local and national leadership offering no way forward to victory. Up to this point, they have presented us with the usual parading of USW officials, other AFL-CIO-CLC aligned local bureaucrats and NDP politicians on the picket line. None of this has helped us get a single step closer to achieving wage and benefit gains or putting an end to the piecework or "incentive" system that claimed the lives of three of our colleagues earlier this decade and was the main motivation for our strike.

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee (NSC-RFC) firmly believes that we must break out of the isolation imposed on us by the USW and expand our strike to other sections of the working class. And we have extremely favourable conditions to do just that.

Down the road at Stelco, workers face a battle after it was announced late last month that up to 500 jobs could go due to the impact of the US-Canada trade war, which was triggered by Trump's ambition to take over Canada and has been fuelled by Carney and the trade union bureaucracy's "Team Canada" response. Stelco is owned by Cleveland-Cliffs from the US, where tens of thousands of steelworkers employed by the company and US Steel are working without contracts after the USW agreed to extend them. At Stellantis' Brampton Assembly Plant, some 3,000 laid off workers face the prospect of losing their jobs entirely as Stellantis prepares to sell the plant. They may be forced into producing weapons for Canada's war machine if the Carney government's plan to transfer the plant to military production pays off. At Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie, upwards of 1,000 workers have been laid off over the past year due to Trump's tariffs and the Canadian ruling class's response. This after the company received hundreds of millions of dollars in government trade war subsidies.

All of these workers are our allies who can be united behind us in a cross-border, international movement to secure decent-paying, safe jobs for all.

Realizing this potential depends upon the mobilization of the rank and file by building the NSC-RFC throughout our plant. We need members from every shift and department to put forward the demands of the rank and file, establish delegations to visit Stelco and fight for a joint struggle and appeal to our brothers and sisters in the US to link their contract fight with ours in opposition to the poisonous Canadian and American nationalism trumpeted by the unions.

Local 7135 President Frank Crowder, USW Canada head Marty Warren and the rest of the USW bureaucracy are bitterly hostile to this strategy, because for them the top priority is protecting their partnership with the corporations and governments. Their main concern at NSC is to uphold the "collective bargaining" relationship. They've even gone so far as to abandon the demand to abolish piecework and are instead offering to collaborate with Greg Aziz in setting the "incentive" rates.

Crowder declared in a recent video message to strikers that the refusal of NSC to bargain with the union since the beginning of the strike shows "how little the company cares for its workers." He then talked about aspirational wage increases and some return to the "glory days" when workers at Dofasco and Stelco would leave those jobs to work at National Steel Car due to better pay.

For our part, we were hardly surprised by NSC's hardline refusal to bargain. The company already demonstrated its contempt for its workers by presiding over the conditions that led to three deaths on the job between the fall of 2020 and June 2022.

As for the "glory days," they rested on a set of economic and social conditions that no longer exist due to the globalization of production. In an earlier period, it was possible for nationally based trade unions to secure limited but significant gains for workers through bargaining with the employers. That was the period of national economic regulation following World War II. But globalization turned the entire world economy into a competitive race to the bottom for wages and conditions. Instead of pressing the employers for gains for workers, the unions have become a key lever to enforce concessions down the throats of workers on behalf of the financial elite.

The anti-worker record of the USW

The fact that Mr. Crowder stands squarely in this more than four-

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decade-long series of union bureaucracy-imposed defeats on rank-and-file workers was underscored when he went on to say, “We cannot break!” and advised strikers to “get a job.” Keep showing up for strike duty to receive strike pay but get a job because the USW “fully understands that you need to survive and you need to pay your bills.” Insufficient strike pay from a $600 million strike fund of $420 a week has forced them to tell us to “get a job” and that this “job” is an “act of solidarity” and “from this point forward, every day gives us more power.”

Crowder’s lauding of former USW International President Lynn Williams and the empty “One Day Longer, One Day Stronger” drivel in the same video is highly revealing in this regard. Williams was the USW International President from 1983 to 1994, and prior to that International Secretary from 1977. This means he was complicit in what the USW did during the Phelps-Dodge strike in the early 1980s in Arizona involving 3,000 miners for 3 years. Under Williams’ watch, the USW refused sympathy strikes and any meaningful financial support. The USW even attempted to bribe strike leader Jorge O’Leary with $175,000 to call off the strike. When O’Leary refused and asked that the money go into the strike fund, the Williams-led USW kept the cash and the strike was crushed.

In 1985 and 1986, the Williams-led USW abandoned pattern bargaining in the steel industry, which led to individual Local isolation (sound familiar?) and the selling out of bitter struggles at Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel and USX (US Steel). In fact, at USX, after the longest lockout in steel industry history, the Lynn Williams-led USW agreed to a $2.50 pay cut and nearly 1400 lay offs!

Steel industry employment in the US fell from 453,000 workers at the beginning of the 1980s to 168,000 in 1995. This jobs massacre was mirrored here in Hamilton, Ontario, at Stelco’s Hilton Works, all under the watchful eye of Williams and the USW.

A 2014 obituary for Williams published by the USW is highly revealing as to his role during the restructuring of the North American steel industry. “Mr. Williams used concession negotiations during the crisis to bargain innovative employment agreements and secure for the union a seat in corporate boardrooms, management meetings and sale discussions—places where few American unions appeared at that time,” it states with evident pride, apparently oblivious to the fact that what this amounts to is an admission of union complicity in mass job cuts, plant shutdowns and the fire-sale of assets to new investors. Continuing, the article notes, “His innovations during this time included establishing Voluntary Employee Benefit Associations (VEBAs) to protect workers employed by companies going through bankruptcy. A VEBA is a trust funded usually by the corporation to help provide benefits such as pensions and health insurance for workers.”

In reality, VEBAs became a key mechanism for the union bureaucracy to grow its assets even as industrial employment cratered. Today, the USW sits on more than US$2 billion in assets.

For international class struggle, not corporatist partnerships

This Committee takes a diametrically opposed approach. We’re not interested in seats in corporate boardrooms, administering totally inadequate company-funded pension plans and defending corporatist “partnerships” with the bosses and governments by promoting a nationalist “Team Canada” line.

Real working-class solidarity comes from unifying our struggles across artificial national borders and understanding the class implications of our strike beyond a good contract. For example, one of our demands is to deal with National Steel Car’s leasing program under the marker NSCX. This is an obvious secondary form of profit National Steel Car is using that amounts to a scabbing operation while we are on strike. In an act of REAL solidarity, not the USW’s fake version, this has been answered. Not by pandering to other union bureaucrats in the rail industry, but by an appeal from rank-and-file workers in the rail industry. The US Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee has heard us and is assisting in taking up our struggle. In their words,

“The strike at National Steel Car is our fight. Their call has been made. Set aside every NSCX car. Leave it empty. Do not move it.”

Their statement discusses the toxic nationalism utilized by all the AFL/CIO/CLC unions across North America in this trade war, namely the “Team Canada/America First” on both sides of the border. This has particular importance with the looming job cuts announced at Stelco. The trade unions expect their members to line up behind each others’ capitalists and engage in a fratricidal war, in which there’s nothing in it for us in Canada, the US, or Mexico. This trade war is a conflict between ruling class operatives on either side of arbitrary borders, attempting to decide (through potential financial ruin) who controls the resources of the continent in preparation for war. The USW in Canada is telling us to get behind our “good” capitalists by meeting the US tariffs dollar for dollar, while calling for wage subsidies for employers.

The USW in the US is soft pedalling this by claiming the steel and aluminum tariffs against Canada should be dropped because Canadian steel is used for equipment in the US military, but bad actors (see: China) should be dealt with. This is another form of toxic nationalism that divides workers and pits them against one another while the bosses line their pockets. Moreover, it lines workers up behind the escalation of world war pursued by the governments in Washington and Ottawa as they seek to secure markets, raw materials, cheap labour and trade routes to boost the wealth of their financial oligarchies.

All forms of nationalism need to be rejected immediately, and a serious collaboration between US, Canadian and Mexican steelworkers established. This fight must be waged independent of and in opposition to the trade union bureaucracies and governments, through the formation of rank-and-file committees and the fight for an industrial and political mobilization of the working class against capitalist austerity and war. If you agree, join and help build the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee.

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