As the National Steel Car strike approaches 3-month mark, USW's Crowder champions company, Canadian nationalism at high-level parliamentary committee hearing

Roger Jordan
5 November 2026

The *World Socialist Web Site* has long argued that the trade union bureaucracies have become appendages of management and the state, promoting rabid nationalism and imposing concessions and job cuts on the workers they claim to represent. With workers more internationally united by the process of production than ever before and increasingly rebelling against decades of givebacks, conditions are ripe for workers to assert their class interests. But to do so, they must build rank-and-file committees to free themselves from the shackles of the union apparatuses, put power back on the shop floor where it belongs, and develop an industrial and political working-class counteroffensive across North America.

The urgency of fighting for this program received renewed confirmation Tuesday when Frank Crowder, the president of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 7135—the official bargaining unit for the 1,200 striking National Steel Car (NSC) workers in Hamilton, Ontario—spoke at a Canadian parliamentary committee hearing on the federal Liberal government's Buy Canadian policy.

The workers at NSC's rail car manufacturing plant in Hamilton are approaching the three-month mark of their strike against a barbaric piecework system that claimed the lives of three workers on the job between 2020 and 2022.

Yet, in his testimony before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, Crowder had nothing but praise for National Steel Car-owner Greg Aziz and for economic nationalist policies that pit workers against each other. This included directing blame for the strike away from Aziz and touting an NSC-union scheme, Operation Backbone, to boost Aziz's profits by having the Canadian government subsidize purchases of NSC-made rail cars.

Summing up the content of his remarks before the parliamentary committee, Crowder himself declared, he was doing "the company's job."

The rank-and-file committee formed by National Steel Car workers with the support of the *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly warned that the Steelworkers' apparatus is strangling the strike, opposing any and all efforts to rally broader working-class support.

Opposed to class struggle, to mobilizing tens of millions of workers across North America who, like the NSC workers, confront a state-employer assault on their living standards, jobs and rights, the USW bureaucrats pursue an anti-worker corporatist alliance with big business and their political representatives in the federal Liberal and Ontario Progressive Conservative governments and the rest of the political establishment.

Not incidentally, Crowder's invitation to speak before the high-level parliamentary committee was the outcome of the USW leadership's interactions with the viciously anti-worker Conservative Party, including its labour critic, Kyle Seeback, and Hamilton East MP Ned Kuruc.

The USW Local 7135 president's opening remarks to the Government Operations and Estimates Committee were pitched to the "Team Canada" trade-war alliance of the corporations, governments and union bureaucracies spearheaded by Mark Carney's government. Team Canada has fuelled the trade war that was triggered by Trump's "America First" tariffs, escalated by Ottawa's counter-tariffs, and whose brunt is being borne by workers on both sides of the border through job cuts and price increases. Its flag-waving nationalism and claims "we are all in this together" have served as political cover for the massive escalation of the assault on workers' democratic and social rights implemented by the Carney government, its provincial counterparts and employers from coast to coast.

Crowder continued:

> The purpose of the Buy Canadian policy is to strengthen opportunities for Canadian businesses and help industries become more self-sufficient and resilient to changes in the global economy.
>
> Over a year ago, National Steel Car began ensuring that 98 percent of the rail cars that we build are made from the raw material that is Canadian content. The only content in our rail car, that 2 percent, that is not Canadian, are parts that are simply not available here, but we are doing everything we can.
>
> National Steel Car was forward in their thinking and did this before the Buy Canadian policy was announced in an effort to seek help from our government and gain assistance and relief from the tariffs imposed by the United States of America.
>
> Unfortunately, our efforts have caused more difficulty for National Steel Car. While we have been an exemplary great example of a Canadian company supporting the Canadian domestic economy, the increased costs that we incurred have resulted in less profit that could be shared with our workers. National Steel Car has had to make a contract offer in its bargaining with the union that is well below the rising inflation and cost of living.

Aziz, notorious for his ruthless extraction of profit from the labour of

© World Socialist Web Site

NSC workers, is thus converted by Crowder into a “forward thinking” partner. The USW leaders would have workers believe that he is not seeking to impose real wage cuts and retain piecework because he is a vicious representative of Canada’s capitalist class who has repeatedly forced workers out on strike, including in 2023; but because the Liberal government has failed, as of yet, to provide his profitable business with a huge subsidy. And, in Crowder’s own words, it is this that led to the “unfortunate” fact that the NSC workers have had to take strike action.

Crowder then proceeded to elaborate on why National Steel Car, where workers have experienced round after round of USW-backed concessions contracts for years, and labour under dangerous conditions in a plant that is literally falling apart, is “exemplary” of the ruling class’ “Team Canada” trade-war agenda.

He declared:

> In early 2025, National Steel Car, before the Buy Canadian policy and in response to the tariff threat from a foreign country, introduced a plan called Operation Backbone to all three levels of government. The plan was endorsed by the United Steelworkers. The union attended the presentation to government representatives to show our support. Our participation was a distinctive cooperative moment in union/employer relations...
>
> At the most basic level, the plan was to request support from the government that would keep the union members of USW Local 7135 and the non-bargaining employees working. The plan was to offer funding to our customers to assist in the purchasing of our rail cars. The cost was expected to be net zero as it would offset the amount of employment insurance that the government would have to pay out as well as the loss of income tax collected if these workers were laid off.

Having reassured his ruling-class audience that the USW is doing all it can to protect NSC’s profits and vouched for Aziz’s benevolence as he ruthlessly exploits NSC workers, Crowder proceeded to give a full-throated endorsement of the Canadian ruling elite’s aims in the reactionary trade war with the US. He backed Canadian imperialism’s drive for greater “sovereignty,” which is aimed at giving Ottawa the economic and military capabilities to participate aggressively in the new violent redivision of the world among the great powers for control over markets, raw materials, cheap labour and geostrategic influence.

“Here are some facts about National Steel Car,” continued the USW official. “We are the number one producer of rail cars in North America. No one produces as high a quality of car as us or at the speed we can manufacture. We have patents on the most efficient, cost-effective product. National Steel Car is 100 percent Canadian owned and operated, and has been in business for 114 years. Canada moves 75 percent of all product by rail. We are Canadian infrastructure. The loss of our company would put our country in the position of relying on foreign nations to supply us with the means to move all that product.”

His only complaint was that the Buy Canadian program was being mismanaged by the Liberal government, with the result that “in its current format” it is “hurting us,” and “has the potential to hurt Canadian sovereignty.”

Strikers at NSC may ask themselves what Crowder is referring to with his remark about “patents on the most efficient, cost-effective product” and his boasts about the “speed” with which NSC produces rail cars. Could these concern NSC’s “unique” piecework system, euphemistically called the “incentive program,” which pressures workers to risk their safety to meet unrealistic production targets set by the company in order to receive about a quarter of their wage? Indeed, they surely do.

Crowder’s remarks thus shed new light on why the USW bureaucracy abandoned any struggle at the beginning of contract talks to abolish piecework, even though this was the central demand raised by rank-and-file workers who have experienced its deadly consequences in the plant.

From the standpoint of the bureaucracy, accepting brutal exploitation is the “sacrifice” workers must make to maintain the USW’s alliance with Canadian capital in the escalating trade wars and imperialist wars supported by the entire political establishment to defend “Canadian sovereignty” against “foreign nations.” Just how far to the right this alliance extends was underscored by the visit of far-right Tory leader Pierre Poilievre last month to the NSC picket line, an event that could only have taken place with the coordination of the USW national and local leadership.

Striking NSC workers must repudiate Crowder and the USW’s pro-company, Canadian nationalist propaganda, which goes hand in hand with their repeated efforts to physically bar strikers from speaking to WSWS reporters. While Crowder praises Aziz and hob-knobs with the enemies of the working class in Ottawa he reserves his hatred and redbaiting for the only publication that has fought to mobilize workers throughout North America to defend the National Steel Car workers.

This shows that the USW apparatus is determined to keep the strike isolated from workers’ strongest allies in the working class across Hamilton, Canada, the US and internationally because they are errand boys for Aziz and corporate Canada as a whole.

Strikers cannot win their fight in alliance with their class enemies in Canada’s boardrooms and government ministries, but only by unifying their strike with the insurgent struggles spreading throughout the working class in Canada, the United States and Mexico. NSC strikers should combine their fight for improved conditions with the Stelco workers in Hamilton and nearby Nanticoke workers facing mass layoffs, and the more than 20,000 steelworkers in the US who have been working for over two months on contract extensions approved by the USW bureaucracy at Cleveland-Cliffs and US Steel.

As the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee emphasized in its latest statement,

> It’s time to build the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee to break our strike out of the isolation imposed by the USW apparatus. It should be constructed as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in a decisive repudiation of the nationalism and pro-corporate toadying of the USW bureaucracy, which boasts of heading an “international” union while doing everything to divide workers in Canada and the US.
>
> We need committee members from every shift and department to form delegations to go to visit workers at Stelco, Stellantis and other worksites to fight for a broad-based worker-led industrial and political mobilization in Canada and throughout North America against the ruling elite’s onslaught on our jobs and living conditions. Contact us at nscrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below to join the fight.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site