No to the USW and Crowder's "Buy Canadian" alliance with Aziz and the Liberal government! Mobilize the working class behind our strike!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
19 November 2026

Are you a striking National Steel Car worker? Contact the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee to fight to expand the strike into an industrial and political counteroffensive by filling out the form at the end of this statement.

"In time of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers." - Leon Trotsky, The Transitional Program, Part V, Trade Unions in the Transitional Epoch, 1938.

Brothers and Sisters,

We've been on strike for over 3 months, and the United Steelworkers (USW) has succeeded up to this point in systematically isolating our fight from our strongest allies throughout the working class. We launched this strike because we wanted to end piecework and the dangerous working conditions to which it gives rise, and secure real wage increases after decades of stagnating pay.

Increasing workloads, declining living standards, and the contempt of the bosses for our health and very lives: these are all issues broad layers of workers across Canada and North America have first-hand experience of and would join a fight to oppose if given the chance.

If you want to know why the USW bureaucracy is bitterly hostile to broadening our strike and making it the initiator of a mass political mobilization of workers against capitalist austerity and attacks on worker rights, just look at the escapades of USW Local 7135 President Frank Crowder in Parliament.

On November 3, Crowder gave testimony to the House of Commons Government Expenses and Operations Committee on the Liberal government's reactionary nationalist "Buy Canadian" policy. In the approximately 12-minute exchange, Crowder behaved like a National Steel Car salesman and lauded owner Greg Aziz. He decried how "unfortunate" it was that we had to take strike action, championed corporate Canada's economic nationalist policies in the trade war with the US, and appealed for the Liberal government to fund Aziz's highly profitable business with government subsidies in a joint initiative dubbed "Operation Backbone."

Keep in mind that at the beginning of September, Crowder claimed on CBC News that the union's stance on piecework was a continuation of the historical fight by workers in Hamilton in the 1870s over the 9 hour work day. But whereas workers in Hamilton in the 19th century were fighting to end exploitative practices, Crowder and Co. are today assisting in managing them on the company's behalf.

As we are all aware, Crowder and his pals overrode our opposition to piecework by dropping its abolition as a demand of our strike, replacing it with an appeal to Aziz to let the USW help set the piecework rate!

The veneer of the USW's hollow "One day longer, one day stronger" militancy was taken away a bit more when a few weeks later the USW Local 7135 President announced we should "get a job," with his dutiful Recording Secretary claiming getting a job "was an act of solidarity."

Continuing on this pro-corporate line, the November 3 hearing started off with Crowder cheering on the nationalism of the "Buy Canadian" policy. Its purpose was "to strengthen opportunities for Canadian business" and "help industries become more self-sufficient and resilient to changes in the global economy." One would be excused for mistaking a so-called "labour leader" for sounding like he was auditioning for a job at the Fraser Institute or the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

He went on to claim that National Steel Car was "forward thinking" because NSC had been using 98 percent Canadian content in rail car construction before any "Buy Canadian" policy was introduced. Then he said that NSC had been "an exemplary great example of a Canadian company supporting the Canadian domestic economy…". But the increased costs due to the tariffs "have resulted in less profit that could be shared with our workers."

Note that Crowder said "less profit," not no profit for Aziz and NSC. This is what forced National Steel Car to give us the "last, best, and final" offer we received back in August, not the multi-millionaire Aziz and the corporate elite's insatiable lust to boost returns at our expense.

In all of this flag waving and corporate boot licking, Crowder somehow managed to turn a rapacious capitalist, who has the blood of at least 5 workers on his hands (3 in the last six years) since owning National Steel Car, who is hell bent on squeezing our labour for every penny he can, regardless of consequences, into a "forward thinker."

Now, according to the union president, Aziz is not attempting to rob us through his "incentive plan" but is simply "forward thinking" in his wage rates.

Apparently, Aziz was being "forward thinking" when he stole our vacation pay during the last strike.

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And now, to top it off, Aziz's "forward thinking" is being stunted because the current federal government is not coming through with the public money to back him up.

We assume the USW, through Crowder, feels Aziz is a "forward thinking job creator" for the benefit of their new tax-cutting and deregulating Conservative friends, who invited Crowder to testify to the parliamentary committee just weeks after far-right demagogue Pierre Poilievre put in an appearance at our picket line.

Later on, in his frankly shameful diatribe, Crowder stated:

> In early 2025, National Steel Car, before the "Buy Canadian" policy and before the threat of 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.

He then outlined that this cooperation aimed to persuade the government to fund the purchase of National Steel Car products to the tune of the cost that the government would face in lost tax revenues and employment insurance payouts if we were out of a job!

What amounts to a Triple P (Public Private Partnership…see: an upwards public to private wealth transference exercise) dressed up as an employment program with a labour "leader" as its pitchman and business agent. Public money given to highly profitable carriers (presumably CN, CPKC, Canpotex, etc.) to be then given to Aziz in the hopes of keeping us employed. All endorsed and assisted by the United Steelworkers. We could not have come up with a better example of the degeneration of the trade unions under a decaying capitalism if we tried. No wonder Ned Kuruc, the Conservative MP for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, endorsed it.

The newly minted salesman for National Steel Car… sorry…the USW Local 7135 President, then began touting the wonderfulness of National Steel Car:

> We are the number one producer of railcars in North America. No one produces as high 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% 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.

The class character of the USW is plain for all to see in these statements. It is tied to the nation state and capitalism as the purportedly undying system of socio-economic organization. This is reflected in all the AFL-CIO-CLC unions. They are "partners" of the government and corporate executives, and as a result obstacles for us in achieving our demands.

Crowder's statement was a wholesale embrace of national sovereignty and a further example of the unions' rotten Canadian nationalism, which blocks us from uniting with our class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and internationally. The same type of pitch is made by union bureaucrats in the US and Canada to legitimize support for rearmament, war and economic protectionism. And this at a time when increasingly violent conflicts between the major powers, including Canada, over markets, raw materials and labour are escalating around the world.

Trotsky explains well in the quote we opened this statement with where all of this leads: to union officials becoming government ministers and supporting the ruling class' war effort.

We workers at National Steel Car must take control of this strike through the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, or it will be lost and will end under Aziz's terms when he wants it to end. The USW has proven it will literally go to bat for NSC to maintain its profits, while keeping us isolated out on the street with empty slogans and donated food.

If we seize the leadership of our struggle by building rank-and-file committees, we can mobilize support among workers being drawn into class battles across North America.

We should be reaching out to Stelco and Stellantis workers being thrown under the bus by the USW and Unifor, steelworkers in the US facing another sellout by the USW at Cleveland-Cliffs and US Steel, and striking workers at the Teck Resources copper mine in BC, to mention only some examples. We have no interest in lining up behind the bosses and their errand boys in the union bureaucracy in "Team Canada," but rather in uniting with our class brothers and sisters across the continent confronting the same attacks as us.

We reject that our jobs should be dependent on Aziz turning a profit or handouts from governments to boost corporate Canada's bottom line. We should make our strike the starting point of a mass industrial and political movement of the working class to put an end to corporate profiteering, which claimed the lives of three of our colleagues between 2020 and 2022. That means fighting for an end to exploitative practices like piecework, with no loss of pay, and workers' control over production to manage safety and halt speedup.

We've been on strike for over 90 days, and the USW has proven it does not have our class interests at heart. It is isolating us and focusing on building "partnerships" between the bureaucracy, Aziz and the political establishment. It's time to join the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, under the auspices of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and take control of this strike to win it!

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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