

As Unifor plots to end CAMI strike, corporate press hails union head

By Keith Jones
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Almost 2,800 workers at GM's CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario are mounting the first strike at a Detroit Three facility in Canada in more than two decades.

Now in their tenth full day of strike action, the CAMI workers are seeking to put an end to years of concessions. This includes winning a substantial wage hike after a decade-long wage freeze, eliminating the hated two-tier wages system with its ten-year "grow-in," and securing real job security.

But Unifor (the former CAW—Canadian Auto Workers), which for decades has bullied workers into accepting concession contracts in the name of "saving jobs," has no intention of lifting a finger to fight for any of these demands.

Rather it is maneuvering to shut the strike down and subordinating the workers' struggle to Unifor's alliance with the Trudeau Liberal government and its efforts to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Unifor officials hope to extend this government alliance to include billionaire demagogue Donald Trump and the most rightwing administration in US history.

While workers have been manning the picket lines outside the CAMI plant, Unifor President Jerry Dias has been hobnobbing with Trudeau government officials in Ottawa on the sidelines of the latest round of NAFTA talks. Last night the Unifor president held what the *Globe and Mail* described, in a flattering portrait of Dias published in its Tuesday edition, as "a NAFTA-themed cocktail party." There he entertained Liberal government officials with whom he has been working to "defend Canadian jobs" by fashioning a NAFTA deal crafted so as to push the brunt of job losses arising from the capitalist crisis onto American, and especially Mexican workers.

This is a continuation and intensification of Unifor's ruinous nationalist-corporatist strategy—a strategy, predicated on the subordination of workers' interests to big-business profits, that pits workers against each other in a fratricidal struggle for jobs and investment.

Late yesterday, Unifor announced it was resuming intensive negotiations with GM. Workers must beware: Dias and Unifor are intent on wrapping up the strike, conceivably as early as today. Unifor has already announced once it reaches a tentative agreement with GM, the CAMI workers will immediately be ordered back to work before voting on it. Details of the proposed contract will be kept under wraps until a ratification meeting is organized, at which workers will be presented with a brief, union-selected "highlights" brochure, then ordered to vote.

At the end of last week, Unifor offered GM what it described as an "olive branch" in the hopes of relaunching contract talks. In keeping with the union's conduct throughout the negotiations, Unifor provided no details to CAMI workers about what this entailed, except to say that it concerned monetary issues. Then on Sunday, after two days of talks with GM, it presented the automaker a new global contract offer.

A Unifor Local 88 bargaining update claimed that a counterproposal GM presented yesterday showed "some progress has been made" and said the union has therefore agreed to resume intensive negotiations.

During last year's negotiations with the Detroit Three automakers, Unifor agreed to a pattern settlement that further enshrined the two-tier system, eliminated any form of defined-benefit pension for new hires, and provides meagre wage increases in return for various investment "pledges" management can shred at will.

Unifor has repeatedly signaled that it is prepared to

impose rollbacks even beyond this sell-out “pattern” on CAMI workers. Seeking to “soften” the membership up for further concessions, the union has suggested workers should be happy to have a job. “We can yell all we want,” declared Local 88 Plant Chairman Mike Van Boekel, “but if the plants are empty, there’s nothing to gain Before money, before language, we have to guarantee our jobs are there and that we can support our families.”

Unifor’s one and only demand is that GM designate the CAMI plant the “lead facility” for production of its highly profitable Equinox SUV. Unifor officials have been forthright as to how this designation would serve to push the burden of job cuts onto Mexican workers: were GM to slash production of the Equinox, the axe would have to fall first and principally on workers at the two Mexican plants that also produce the hot-selling SUV.

In reality, any respite for Canadian workers under such a provision would only be temporary, or to be more precise, would be at the expense of the fundamental interests of all autoworkers in North America and internationally.

The past three decades during which the UAW and Unifor have worked hand-in-glove with companies, inciting workers to whipsaw one another, have demonstrated that all this leads to is a race to the bottom that only the automakers win.

Throughout the CAMI strike, Unifor officials have been whipping up Canadian nationalism, including displaying giant Canadian flags on the picket lines. Unifor officials have sought to prevent CAMI workers from speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, which is the only publication that has provided rank-and-file workers with a voice while advancing an international strategy to win their struggle.

Meanwhile Dias—who the *Globe and Mail* says “has access to the most powerful people on Parliament Hill”—has been working hand-in-glove with Trudeau, whose government has expanded Canada’s participation in Washington’s incendiary military-strategic offensives, announced a 70 percent hike in military spending and a vast privatization program, and whose closet provincial allies, including the Unifor-backed Ontario Liberal government, have imposed sweeping social spending cuts.

Dias is unabashed in his support for Trudeau. He told the *Globe and Mail*, the prime minister “sees us (the union bureaucracy) as a natural ally in trying to build a strong economy,” then added, “Profitable companies are a wonderful thing, and that’s what I want.”

If the CAMI strike is not to be sold out, workers must seize leadership of their struggle from the hands of Unifor and repudiate its nationalist, pro-capitalist perspective. This requires the building of a rank-and-file committee, led by the most militant workers, independent of and in opposition to Unifor. Such a committee must lead the strike and a campaign to mobilize autoworkers across North America against *all* concessions and in defence of the jobs of *all* workers.

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