

Unifor, the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* and the politics of the CAMI strike

By Jerry White
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From the beginning of the strike by 2,800 workers at General Motors' CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* has fought for the broadest mobilisation of the working class behind the CAMI workers. In particular, the newsletter has insisted that autoworkers need an international strategy to unite Canadian, US and Mexican workers in a common struggle against the global auto giant and the governments in Ottawa, Washington and Mexico City, which back GM's drive to slash labour costs and boost its profits.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* has made no bones about its opposition to the failed policies of Unifor, its predecessor, the Canadian Auto Workers, the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the United States and the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM). Far from uniting workers in a common struggle, the nationalist and pro-capitalist politics of these unions—which each vie to attract investment by offering up their workers as cheap labour—have only served to divide and weaken workers and ensnare them in a fratricidal race to the bottom.

Because the WSWS newsletter has not acted as an uncritical cheerleader for Unifor, the union apparatus has done everything it can to bar WSWS reporters from the picket lines, to remove WSWS articles from Facebook pages and to intimidate workers who speak out through the pages of the newsletter. Unable to answer the political criticisms of the WSWS, Local 88 officials have slandered the WSWS as “fake news” and claimed that it is sowing divisions among workers to weaken the strike.

In the name of “solidarity,” Unifor officials have insisted that rank-and-file workers follow the dictates of the union without raising any questions or criticisms of its policies, record, or even the union's conduct of the contract negotiations.

As for the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, according to Unifor and Local 88 officials, it is only concerned with bringing its “socialist political agenda” to workers, when what is needed is “solidarity, not politics.”

But the course of the CAMI strike—and the entire experience of autoworkers in Canada, not to mention the US and Mexico—has revealed that CAMI workers are engaged in a political struggle.

On the one side is a ruthless corporation, backed to the hilt by the courts, the police, the media and the big business politicians, who just eight years ago handed over billions in tax-payers' money to bail out GM and its Wall Street and Bay Street investors. In their response to Unifor's pleas for future product commitments, GM executives flatly said, “The company maintains complete discretion on how to address business conditions and needs and where those needs will be built.”

In other words, the capitalist owners insist the factories they operate around the world are their personal property and they will build cars wherever they see fit—i.e., wherever they can get the cheapest labour and pump the highest profits out of the backs of workers.

On the other side are CAMI workers who insist that workers have the right both to job security and financial security. The strike and the ripple effect throughout the GM empire have demonstrated once again that it is collective labour of the working class that produces society's wealth, not the financial swindling of stock market speculators and corporate CEOs.

More than 150 years ago, the founder of scientific socialism, Karl Marx, said, “Every class struggle is a political struggle.” By that he meant that the working class had to organize itself as an independent political force in order to take political power in its own hands. Only in this way could workers wrench control of society from the capitalist exploiters and become masters of their own destiny.

Unifor claims it is illegitimate to “bring politics” into the CAMI struggle. But Unifor President Jerry Dias, Local 88 President Dan Borthwick and Plant Chairman Mike Van Boekel constantly push politics, just not politics that benefit the working class.

Dias and Unifor spearheaded the “Anybody but Harper” campaign in the 2015 election, telling autoworkers to place their confidence in Justin Trudeau and the Liberals, and now routinely boast about their access to Liberal cabinet ministers.

But the Liberal Party—just like the Tories and for that matter the social-democratic New Democratic Party—is a capitalist party. It defends the private property and economic domination of General Motors and the rest of the corporate and financial elite over the working class.

Trudeau's closest provincial political ally, Kathleen Wynne's Ontario Liberal government—which Unifor helped elect—has carried out a massive assault on social spending over the last four years and used strike-breaking legislation to impose wage cuts on teachers.

As for the Trudeau government, it has launched a massive campaign to privatize public infrastructure, has expanded Canada's role in US-led wars and military-strategic offenses around the world, and is planning savage austerity measures to fund its proposed 70 percent increase in military spending by 2026.

How is it possible for workers to win their social rights—for good-paying and secure jobs, for high-quality health care, housing, public education, for a comfortable retirement and a world free from war—if they are politically tied to the representatives of their class enemies?

According to Dias & Co., not only should workers look to Trudeau. They should also seek to work with the fascistic president of the United States, Donald Trump, and his billionaire crony, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, with whom the Unifor president has met repeatedly. In his remarks at Sunday's strike rally, Dias claimed that Trudeau and Trump could be persuaded into renegotiating a North American trade deal that would protect the jobs and livelihoods of workers in Canada and the US, while lifting the Mexican workers out of poverty!

What worker in his right mind would trust Trump, the most hated president in the history of the United States, to defend their interests? Far from protecting American and Canadian workers, let alone those in Mexico, Trump has launched a massive witch hunt and deportation campaign against immigrant workers and brought the world to the brink of nuclear war with his threats to “annihilate” North Korea. His “America First” policy has boiled down to trade war measures against Mexico, China and other countries, including Canada, and slashing taxes and regulations for corporations like GM, which has absolutely no intention of ending its exploitation of Mexican workers.

There is no such thing as “fair trade” under capitalism. The system is not based on fairness, but on the exploitation of the international working class for profit. The NAFTA renegotiation is not aimed at improving the conditions of workers, but at bolstering big business profit by boosting the competitive advantages of its constituent capitalist nation-states.

The nationalist and pro-capitalist politics of Unifor and the UAW only tie workers to needs of their “own” capitalist exploiters. Over the last four decades, the unions have virtually abandoned strikes, boasted of their “partnerships” with the auto bosses and handed over the hard-won gains of generations of autoworkers.

Dias and Van Boekel express amazement that GM is not promising additional investment after Unifor helped it impose

six-day work weeks, a 10-year wage “grow-in period,” and conditions at CAMI that Van Boekel acknowledges resemble a prison. But none of the givebacks handed over by the unions in Canada or the US have ever “saved” jobs. They have only set a newer, lower benchmark for competitive struggle between workers to see who will work for the lowest wages and under the worst conditions.

The struggle to defend jobs and living standards demands politics—but the right politics! Socialism is not a utopian idea that has no relevance to the immediate struggle, as the Unifor officials claim. On the contrary, the need for socialism arises precisely because the old economic and social order—from which the union officials benefit—cannot meet the needs of society and have become the central obstacle to human progress.

The great industrial enterprises and modern technology—sembled by the collective labour of generations of workers—cannot be left in the hands of financial speculators and corporate executives who are solely concerned with their personal enrichment. The international working class must not be divided by outmoded national boundaries and driven against each other through trade war measures and a devastating world war.

Instead, as Marx said, “Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!”

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* encourages CAMI workers to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands through the election of strike committees to formulate workers' demands and fight to broaden the struggle throughout the North American auto industry. This must be combined with a new socialist political strategy for the working class: the fight for a workers' government that would transform the auto monopolies into public enterprises, democratically owned and controlled by the working class. The Socialist Equality Party is leading this fight and urges workers to contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>