

Unifor launches anti-Mexican boycott as diversion from fight over Oshawa closure

By Carl Bronski
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At a press conference Friday, Unifor President Jerry Dias called for consumer boycott of Mexican built vehicles, ratcheting up the union's reactionary nationalist campaign aimed at diverting workers' anger over the closure of the Oshawa, Ontario, General Motors factory.

General Motors has targeted the Oshawa assembly plant for closure in 2019 as part of a re-structuring program that will see 2,500 jobs lost in Oshawa and another 12,500 white collar and production jobs cut and four plants closed in the United States.

Dias said that Unifor will ask Canadian consumers not to buy GM vehicles assembled in Mexico and suggested that Canadians write GM to support his boycott call. He further stated that Unifor would approach United Auto Workers (UAW) executives in the United States in early February to discuss whether union officials there would support his proposed boycott.

In another diversion, Unifor, earlier this week, began a symbolic "blockade" of GM office headquarters in Oshawa. After assembly and feeder parts workers spontaneously organized several sit-down work stoppages, Unifor has now moved to channel seething discontent into channels that will not impact GM production.

When asked by a reporter Friday whether Unifor was planning any strike action against GM, Dias was deliberately evasive. However, as Friday's press conference made clear, Unifor has no intention of waging a serious fight.

Instead, Unifor is ratcheting up its filthy anti-Mexican campaign aimed at driving a wedge between Canadian auto workers and their brother and sister workers south of the Rio Grande who are currently waging a heroic battle against maquiladora sweatshops in Matamoros .

Dias did not utter a word about the largest strike in North America in decades, as 70,000 workers, many of them in the auto parts industry, have been on a militant wildcat strike in Matamoros for over a week against both management and the corrupt unions that serve as cheap labor contractors. Parts shortages have already forced Ford's Flat Rock,

Michigan, plant to close for two weeks. In addition, Ford workers in Oakville, Ontario, have reported a looming parts crisis there. Indeed, the same day that Dias was preening his phoney "fightback" feathers, tens of thousands more Mexican workers were preparing to join the Matamoros strike wave.

But rather than solidarize with the courageous fight of Mexican workers, Dias once again spewed his anti-Mexican nationalist poison, calling on consumers to hammer Mexican production—and therefore Mexican jobs. Such actions only serve to divide workers one against the other in a never-ending race to the bottom. It has been this nationalist perspective that has allowed the auto companies to whip-saw jobs and wages back and forth across borders for decades.

Dias, fully aware that autoworkers are beginning to break from Unifor's nationalism, felt it circumspect to begin his grab for Mexican jobs at the press conference with the claim that "we are not attacking Mexican workers." That lie was quickly jettisoned.

When Dias was asked specifically if his proposed boycott would harm Canadian auto parts workers, he asserted that it would only impact Mexican workers employed in companies like Canadian owned Magna and Martinrea and other multi-nationals that operate in the Mexican maquiladoras zone.

The fact is that auto production is so integrated that it is virtually impossible to determine the "nationality" of any vehicle. For example, the GM St. Catharines powertrain plant sends its engines to Mexico for final assembly while the GM CAMI facility in Ingersoll, Ontario, assembles the Equinox with major components shipped from Mexico.

As an Oshawa GM worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, Dias is "spreading Mexican hate and opposition. It's so obvious the dividing orders have been given so we won't support their cause. It's so plain to see now what's going on. The corporations, union and media are all revealing themselves for what they are. The more this Mexico thing spreads, the more it exposes their

corrupt intentions.”

The appeal for the international unity of the working class is not a holiday phrase—it is a strategic necessity and the basis for unleashing the immense social strength of the working class. This is objectively shown in the very production process itself. A vehicle that rolls off the assembly line in Mexico or the US or Canada is comprised of parts that have crossed national boundaries dozens of times.

To take just one example previously cited by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, to produce the seat control button on a car seat a capacitor manufactured by workers in Asia is shipped to the US and is shipped again to Ciudad Juárez and inserted by Mexican workers into a circuit board. Then, it is shipped back to the US, where warehouse workers in Texas move and store the circuit board until it is shipped *back* to Mexico, to Matamoros, where the circuit board is inserted into a seat activator button. Then, the activator is shipped to either Texas or Canada, where auto parts workers install the activator into the seat itself. Finally, the seat is sent to an assembly plant and installed into the body of the car.

Unifor’s nationalist strategy has been a disaster for autoworkers. Broad sections of the US and Canadian heartland have been devastated by plant closures while Unifor and UAW executives enjoy six figure salaries and lavish perks. Now GM is planning to axe another 15,000 jobs.

The anti-Mexican campaign by Unifor as well as its phony blockade are reruns of a movie workers have seen many times before.

In 2008, only two weeks after promising the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) continued truck plant production under terms of a new contract, GM announced the imminent closure of the operation. Like now, the CAW leadership then worked might and main to try to channel the tremendous anger amongst auto workers and community members into protests that relied on nationalist demagoguery and moral appeals to big business politicians and GM executives. The CAW bureaucracy squashed calls for wildcat strike action that had been brewing on the shop floors of the giant Oshawa complex.

Instead, CAW officialdom organized a so-called blockade of GM office headquarters in Oshawa. The “blockade,” however, was a rather porous one. In court proceedings brought by the company to seek an injunction against the headquarters protest, CAW lawyers argued that the union had allowed GM to send all staff they deemed essential into the office building.

In any case, with work-at-home technology now a standard feature for office employees, Unifor’s stunt is even less effective.

Thirteen days after the inception of the blockade, it ended after the court ruled the action was illegal. Both company officials and union bureaucrats recognized the protest for what it was—an exercise by the CAW leadership to head off any potential militant response from the rank-and-file to the closure announcement by providing a high-profile, but nonetheless harmless, avenue for angry workers to blow off some steam.

The earlier sit-down action taken in Oshawa demonstrates the determination of autoworkers to fight. However, if workers leave the conduct of their fight in the hands of Unifor, it will inevitably be betrayed. To be successful in their struggle, autoworkers must organize a rank-and-file factory committee elected from the most trusted militant workers to take charge of their struggle. The committee should issue an urgent appeal for a joint fightback to GM workers and other autoworkers in Canada, the United States, Mexico and internationally as part of a united fight to defend the 15,000 GM workers threatened with lay-offs and the tens of thousands of additional jobs in the parts, supplier, and other industries that will be affected by GM’s job massacre.

An important step in organizing such an international fight by autoworkers has already been taken. At a meeting organized by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* in Detroit in December, autoworkers from Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler agreed to form a coordinating committee to plan actions to mobilize the working class as a whole beginning with a demonstration of workers from throughout the American mid-west and Canada scheduled for February 9 in Detroit outside GM headquarters. Canadian workers who wish to take this fight forward are encouraged to attend.

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To contact the WSWS and the
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