

Unite US, Canadian, and Mexican workers against all concessions and job cuts!

A call to action to Canadian Detroit Three autoworkers: Oppose Unifor's nationalist pro-company strategy!

By WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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With less than a week to go before the expiration of the contracts at the Detroit Three's Canadian operations, the urgent task before the 17,000 Ford, General Motors, and Fiat-Chrysler workers is to organize independently of the pro-company Unifor union apparatus. Workers must take the contract struggle into their own hands by building rank-and-file committees in every plant committed to opposing *all* job cuts and concessions, overturning the hated multi-tier wage system, and unifying autoworkers in Canada with their class brothers and sisters in the United States and Mexico.

Autoworkers must be armed with their own international strategy to oppose the global strategy of the transnational automakers. In the current contract negotiations, the Detroit Three are determined to slash their labour costs by imposing further concessions and speed-up, so as to swell investor profit and fund the industry's "transformation" to electric and autonomous vehicle production. They and their competitors have already placed hundreds of thousands of auto jobs on the chopping block in North America, Europe, and Asia.

When Ford Canada learned Unifor President Jerry Dias had selected it as the target company, it immediately responded by declaring that any agreement would have to ensure Ford's "global competitiveness." In plain language, the auto bosses intend to use the threat of mass layoffs and plant shutdowns to blackmail autoworkers into voting for another round of concessions.

Unifor's response has been to double down on its nationalist-corporatist strategy, whereby the union works to ensure—at workers' expense—that the Detroit Three's Canadian operations are more lucrative than those in the US, indeed their most profitable anywhere.

Dias has announced that a principal union goal is to negotiate three-year contracts with the Detroit Three so that the next negotiating round in 2023 will be synchronized with that at

their US operations. As Dias has himself made clear with his complaints about the US-based UAW securing all the "product and program allocations," Unifor's aim is not to unite Canadian and American workers against their common enemy. Rather it is to better position itself to compete with the UAW for investments. That is, to pit Canadian and US workers against each other.

This was well understood by the company-aligned Center for Automotive Research think tank, whose vice president, Kristin Dziejek, said, "Going in simultaneously," will "create ... more opportunity for whipsaw."

Unifor and the UAW: the Detroit Three's accomplices in whipsawing

The nationalism peddled by Unifor and its Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) predecessor over the past 35 years has proven to be an indispensable weapon for the automakers in driving down wages, gutting workplace protections, and boosting profits in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. By pitting Canadian and American autoworkers against each other, Unifor and the UAW have facilitated the whipsawing of wages, benefits, and jobs back and forth across North America's national borders.

In the process, they have emerged as junior partners of the corporations with interests that are hostile to rank-and-file autoworkers. This is shown most graphically by their systematic sabotaging of all worker opposition to plant shutdowns (including their smothering of all job action against the 2019 Oshawa GM car assembly plant closure), and their imposition of round-after-round of wage and benefit cuts and work-rule concessions.

Dias and his fellow union bureaucrats now want to take their whipping up of nationalist divisions to a new pitch of intensity. Unifor is pressing its "partners" in the big business Trudeau

Liberal government to adopt a “made in Canada” auto strategy based on huge handouts to Ford, GM, and Fiat-Chrysler to secure “product” and “investments” at their Canadian plants.

What Dias neglects to mention is that any government support will be tied to comprehensive restructuring plans to boost productivity and profitability, as happened during the 2008-9 CAW-supported auto industry “bailout.”

Unifor’s “strategy” to “defend Canadian jobs”—massive givebacks to the automakers, whipsawing, anti-Mexican vitriol, pleas for state funds for the auto bosses, and phony “production guarantees” that the companies violate at will—has proven ruinous. Ontario and Quebec are dotted with shuttered plants. Autoworkers, especially younger workers, are in real terms making only a fraction of what they did a generation ago.

Autoworkers must reject Unifor’s systematic subordination of workers’ basic interests—jobs, wages, and during the COVID-19 pandemic even their health and lives—to capitalist profits.

The alternative is to mobilize autoworkers in Canada, the US, and Mexico in a joint counter-offensive to overturn all concessions and defend all jobs. Such a counter-offensive can be developed only through a political and organizational break with Unifor and the UAW.

Build a network of rank-and-file committees independent of Unifor

There is an enormous well of rank-and-file anger against the auto bosses and their Unifor accomplices. But if workers are to prevent Unifor from once again running their struggle into the ground and corraling them into voting on a concessionary contract whose true details they have not been allowed to see, they must act now. They must take matters into their own hands by building a network of rank-and-file committees in all Detroit Three and auto industry plants.

Through these democratically organized committees, workers can formulate their own demands for the contract fight. These should include:

- a major pay increase to account for the decades of wage and benefit cuts;
- the abolition of the multi-tier wage system;
- the rehiring of all autoworkers laid off in recent months by GM in Oshawa, Ford in Oakville, and Fiat-Chrysler in Windsor;
- and workers’ control of line speeds and production to ensure safe working conditions amid the pandemic.

The rank-and-file committees must prepare to answer the auto bosses’ concessions blackmail with an industry-wide

strike, and immediately set about forging links with autoworkers in Mexico and in the US, where workers are labouring under illegitimate contracts negotiated by UAW bureaucrats whom a criminal investigation has shown were being paid massive company kickbacks.

They should also appeal for support from other sections of the working class, including health care workers, service sector workers, and teachers, who confront a no less brutal assault on their working conditions and lives amid the ruling elite’s reckless reopening of the economy.

Autoworkers in the US and Mexico have already taken important first steps in this direction that must serve as an example and impulse for workers in Canada.

In the past four months, autoworkers at plants in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois have formed rank-and-file safety committees to fight for safe working conditions against the joint conspiracy of the bosses and corrupt UAW to enforce a return to “normal” production amid a raging pandemic.

In Mexico, highly exploited workers in maquiladora-belt factories staged a wave of wildcat strikes at the beginning of 2019. Then in March of this year, they participated in the rank-and-file initiated job actions over the lack of COVID-19 protections that forced the auto giants to temporarily shutter production across North America. Workers at GM’s Silao complex have heroically defied company and union retaliation and fought to unite with workers in the US and Canada.

Detroit Three workers in Canada must now fight to make the 2020 contract struggle the spearhead of a coordinated international counter-offensive against the globally organized automakers and their systematic efforts, aided and abetted by their UAW and Unifor, to pit workers against each other in a never-ending race to the bottom.

This international strategy must be based on a socialist program that has as its starting point the needs of working people, not what the corporations claim they can afford or investors’ profits.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* will provide Ford, GM, and Fiat-Chrysler workers with its full support in waging this fight. We strongly appeal to all autoworkers who agree with this statement to contact us today for assistance in establishing a rank-and-file committee at your plant.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>