SUPPORT THE NATIONAL STEEL CAR STRIKE! FOR CLASS WAR, NOT TRADE WAR!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

I extend my fullest solidarity to the more than 1,200 workers at National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario, who walked off the job on August 12 after voting by 78 percent to reject the company's "last, best, and final offer." The workers at the largest rail car manufacturing plant in North America are members of United Steelworkers Local 7135 and are fighting to abolish a brutal piecework system that has led to three deaths in the last few years.

This is your second strike at the plant in three years, and the issues are the same ones confronting workers across North America and internationally: murderous working conditions, speed-up, job cuts, and a union bureaucracy that colludes with management. At the center is the piecework "incentive program"—a system of wage theft and speed-up that was the root cause of the deaths of Fraser Cowan, Collin Grayley, and Quoc Le between 2020 and 2022. Owner Greg Aziz paid $650,000 in fines for three deaths—walk-around money for a man indicted for $625 million in securities fraud. As the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee has stated, Aziz treats his horses better than the workers who generate his profits.

Your strike is part of an international upsurge of workers against war-driven inflation, austerity and inequality. It takes place alongside the rejection of a contract extension by 10,000 UAW members at John Deere across Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas, and as 23,000 USW members at US Steel and Cleveland-Cliffs approach a September 1 contract expiration. At Columbia University, postdoctoral workers, also UAW members, have just voted by over 90 percent to authorize a strike. Nearly 17,000 Boeing engineers and technicians have rejected union-backed contracts and voted to strike.

In Canada, CPKC signal workers struck for months before binding arbitration was imposed, GM and Stellantis workers are still in a contract battle, and hundreds of thousands of public sector workers face a fight in the fall against the Carney government's job cuts and insulting wage offers. From the US to Canada, workers face the same corporations and big business politicians, the same attacks, and the same union apparatuses functioning as an industrial police force.

National Steel Car workers saw this playbook in 2023. The USW isolated the strike for 41 days, starved workers on $260 a week while sitting on an $850 million strike fund, paraded NDP politicians for photo ops, and rammed through a contract that left piecework intact. The union apparatus is following the same script—this time at $425 a week in strike pay—while concealing from the membership what it even proposed on wages and benefits. What we do know is damning: the USW Local 7135 executive went into bargaining prepared to collaborate with National Steel Car in administering the piecework system. The union that denounces the "incentive plan" for the cameras has offered to help Greg Aziz run it.

I express my full support for the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, founded by shop floor workers on the eve of the 2023 strike precisely because they understood the USW would sell them out. Its demands—a 25 percent wage increase, immediate abolition of piecework without a pay cut, doubling strike pay to $850 a week, and worker control over safety—are demands every worker can rally behind.

I urge railroad workers in Canada and the United States to support the demand of the rank-and-file committee to set aside every NSCX car Aziz has leased to undermine the impact of the strike. This bold call revives the tradition of Eugene Debs and the American Railway Union, which halted Pullman cars in 1894. This is the cross-border, cross-industry solidarity that can break the isolation imposed by the bureaucracy.

This strike unfolds as Trump escalates his trade war against Canada, doubling auto tariffs to 50 percent and invoking Section 338 of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930—the law that deepened the world depression, split the world into protectionist blocs and led directly to the

Second World War. Trump's aim is the deindustrialization of Ontario and Quebec, with the whip of unemployment used to drive down wages in both countries.

On August 25, UAW President Shawn Fain declared that the UAW "rejects any escalation on Canada, a country with strong unions and labor standards," yet in the very next breath proclaimed that the UAW "will always support strategic tariffs, including the 232 tariffs on auto and heavy truck." This is hypocrisy of the rankest kind. Fain claims he opposes escalation against Canada while supporting the very tariffs destroying Canadian jobs. He calls for rewriting the USMCA to force "an increase in American-made parts"—economic nationalism that tosses Canadian and Mexican workers out of their jobs and demands American workers celebrate it as a victory.

But Carney's counter-tariffs and the support for trade war by the USW, Unifor and other Canadian unions is a dead end for workers. Workers cannot defend their jobs and living standards by looking to the Liberals and the NDP and their rhetoric about "Team Canada." Like Trump and the Democrats in the US, the corporate controlled parties in Canada are using the trade war to demand that workers sacrifice their jobs and living standards to boost the competitive position of "their own" corporations.

The answer to the race to the bottom is international working-class unity. Workers have no interest in taking sides in this inter-capitalist conflict. Our enemy is not our class brothers and sisters of different countries but the corporate oligarchs, politicians, and union bureaucrats demanding that workers pay for their trade wars and militarism.

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee has posed the alternative: class war, not trade war. It calls on workers across Canada, the United States, and Mexico to unite across national and union boundaries against their common exploiters. This is what the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) fights for.

The integrated economy of North America, built by the working class of every country in the hemisphere, must be taken out of private hands and reorganized on socialist foundations—the banks and major corporations transformed into public utilities under democratic workers' control, production directed to social need rather than private profit and imperialist war. This requires the fight for workers' power and for workers' governments throughout the hemisphere.

The strike at National Steel Car can become the starting point for a counter-offensive by workers across North America. But only if workers break the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracy, build rank-and-file committees in every plant and on every picket line, and unite internationally, including to ban the handling of any NSCX car by railway, auto and other workers.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved