



The lengthy and bitter strike by 2,000 United Aircraft workers (later called Pratt and Whitney) in Quebec, members of Local 510 of the UAW, began on January 7, 1974 and continued for 20 months. It was one of the longest and most violent strikes in Canadian history. The strike focused initially on wages and benefits but became a strike about union recognition and the Rand Formula. It was a key confrontation of the 1970s:

- It established the UAW in Quebec as a militant union that supported Quebec national rights and that was not afraid to take on the toughest battles of the workers' movement;
- The United Aircraft strike created tensions between the Canadian UAW and the International leadership that led to growing Canadian nationalism and to Quebec's demand for autonomy within the union;
- The brutal police repression against the UAW workers turned many people against the Liberal government and contributed to the election of the Parti Québécois (PQ) in 1976;
- The strike helped pressure the PQ government to bring in the Rand Formula (dues check-off) for all unionized Quebec workers in 1977.

For many Quebecers:

*The strike came to symbolize the refusal of Quebecers to be treated like colonials by a foreign based multi-national which refused to accept standards that had become common in neighbouring Ontario.*  
**Sam Gindin, The Canadian Auto Workers, 1995**

Because of the anti-French sentiments expressed by the company (headquartered in Connecticut), the strike quickly became a cause for the UAW and the Canadian and Quebec labour movements. The UAW poured money into the strike and the International Executive Board of the UAW voted to contribute extra funds. However, Emil Mazey, Secretary Treasurer of the UAW, was opposed to this move to support the strike. He wanted the strike terminated and, while Canadian Director Dennis McDermott was out of the country, sent letters to the strikers and to all Canadian locals accusing the local union of fraud in obtaining extra benefits. This letter was misleading as the funds were being channeled into emergency relief for the strikers. Mazey's action threatened to undermine the union's position in the United Aircraft dispute.

At the next Canadian Council meeting, a furious McDermott put forward and received support for a resolution condemning Mazey's actions. This was the first time a Canadian Director had demanded a reversal on a major policy issue:

*In a strange twist of events, sensitivity to Quebec nationalism had led to a crucial expression of Canadian sovereignty and nationalism.*  
**Sam Gindin, The Canadian Auto Workers, 1995**

The company operated the plant with scabs. Following a failed attempt at mediation in May, 1975, a group of strikers occupied the plant and demanded a settlement to the strike. The Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) staged a massive rally outside the plant with 100,000 supporters.

With the arrival of provincial riot police, the strikers attempted to surrender peacefully. Strikers bearing white flags of surrender were beaten by police and many were severely injured. Thirty-four faced trial and three were jailed for almost four months.

Finally, with the strike entering its twentieth month, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa came up with a settlement that both the company and the UAW agreed to recommend. On August 26, 1975, the membership of Local 510 voted to accept the agreement.

While the union won many of its demands including voluntary overtime, it failed to win the Rand Formula. In 1977, the newly elected Parti Québécois government brought in major reforms to the Labour Code including the Rand Formula and anti-scab legislation.

