

Canada: Thousands march against Oshawa plant closure

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Thousands of trade unionists from across southern Ontario joined outraged local residents in a rally and march in Oshawa, Thursday to protest the scheduled closure of the General Motors truck assembly plant in mid-2009. Speakers from the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and their supporters in the Canadian trade union bureaucracy and the New Democratic Party promoted a right-wing nationalist perspective at the event, calling for Buy Canadian policies and for GM to keep product in Oshawa by cutting auto worker jobs in the United States and Mexico.

GM announced the shutdown only two weeks after CAW President Buzz Hargrove had rammed through a new three-year contract that offered up massive concessions and accepted the imminent closure of GM's Windsor Transmission plant in exchange for supposed job guarantees at other GM facilities—guarantees that Hargrove said would keep trucks rolling off the line in Oshawa through 2011 and beyond. But GM, citing the freshly-minted contract's language, argued that market conditions had changed, thereby voiding future product commitments.

Since then, the CAW leadership has worked might and main to try to channel the tremendous anger amongst auto workers and members of the community into channels of protest that rely on “moral” appeals to big business politicians and GM executives. The CAW bureaucracy has so far been able to squash calls for wildcat strike action that have been brewing on the shop floors of the giant Oshawa complex.

Since the middle of last week the CAW officialdom has organized a so-called “blockade” of GM headquarters in Oshawa. The “blockade”, however, is a rather porous one. In court proceedings brought by the company on Wednesday to seek an injunction against the headquarters protest, CAW lawyers argued that the

union has allowed GM to send any staff at all that they deem essential into the office building.

GM has filed for a lifting of the protest and is claiming \$1.5 million in damages. GM brought up in court documents the fact that a slow moving motorcade arranged by the union last Saturday (June 7) slowed production lines for 45 minutes. Chris Buckley, president of the local union, revealed that he had personally intervened to unblock the congestion around the plant gates to get part supplies into the plant and quickly apologized to the company for any inconvenience.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) campaigned on an international socialist program at the plant gates during shift change and also visited the protest at GM headquarters. Workers were disgusted with the attacks on their jobs and living standards by the company and voiced strong frustration with a union leadership that has been unable to defend their interests.



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