

Strong support from Canadian Fiat Chrysler workers for an international struggle

Jerry White
24 August 2015

Fiat Chrysler workers at the Brampton, Ontario factory gave a warm welcome to campaigners from the *World Socialist Web Site* Autoworker Newsletter on Saturday. A team made up of US and Canadian campaigners went to the plant the day after distributing the newsletter to General Motors workers at the nearby Oshawa plant.

Both Oshawa and Brampton are part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), which, with over six million people, is Canada's most populous region and one of the most populous metropolitan areas in North America.

The Fiat Chrysler factory, which was built in 1986 and was originally owned by American Motors Corporation, employs 3,418 hourly workers on two shifts. Last year they produced 222,829 Dodge Charger, Dodge Challenger and Chrysler 300 models.

There are, however, no future plans for the factory. Earlier this year Fiat Chrysler (FCA) boss Sergio Marchionne complained that Canada "is not what I would call the cheapest jurisdiction in which to produce." Like GM and Ford, FCA is using the threats of further layoffs and plant closings to wrench additional tax abatements from the Canadian and Ontario governments, along with more wage and benefit concessions from Unifor, formerly the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union.

In 1985, the CAW split from the UAW, claiming there was a Canadian road to defend autoworkers against the global carmakers. Whatever cost advantages the CAW thought it could offer the companies, based on a favorable exchange rate and subsidized health care, have long been undermined by the tens of billions of dollars in concessions handed over by the UAW in the US and even cheaper labor rates in Mexico. Since 2000, approximately 55,000 auto production and auto

parts jobs have been wiped out in Canada and five assembly plants have been closed.

Workers coming off the day shift on Saturday eagerly took copies of the Autoworker Newsletter and many stopped to discuss the current contract fight facing 140,000 GM, Ford and FCA workers in the US. Several expressed keen interest in uniting US, Canadian and Mexican workers. They also responded positively to campaigners' criticisms of the nationalism of the UAW and Unifor, which allowed the companies to whipsaw workers against each other.

Paul, a temporary part time worker (TPT) at the plant for four years, told the WSWS, "I believe that they're trying to fight for job security and to maintain what we have here but the problem is that the corporation wants to slash wages further and what they've done is make the jobs, especially in assembly, a lot more difficult. The jobs are quicker and production has increased--they're doing about 450 cars a shift. The jobs have changed since I started. There's been a lot of cutbacks and so on. They've tried to save money."

He continued, saying, "They use WCM [world class manufacturing] as a tactic to try to increase efficiency, but by increasing efficiency you're making the jobs difficult because you're adding more and a lot of workers can't keep up. And also, the workforce is older too. There hasn't been a major hiring at this plant since 2005 and all they've hired are students to fill the gap. We're not paid the same now either.

"Years ago before the Chrysler bankruptcy the wages were the same and we used to get time and a half regardless of what hours you'd put in if, for example, you were working a Saturday. Now you need 40 hours a week to get time and a half on a Saturday. Before it was the same as the full-timers. They've also cut benefits to the full-timers too all in the name of making

profit,” Paul concluded.

A senior worker said, “If we get a raise and get more than \$35 an hour, our wage will be in the millwright range and our pensions will go up \$300 a month. They don’t want that to happen. That’s why they want to give us a one-time bonus instead of raising our wages.”

Another worker with 27 years said he could not wait to get out, and with three years to go he was counting down the days. As late as ten years ago, he said, the finishing shop had 27 men. Now it has 14 with more work to do.

Several second-tier workers stopped to talk to campaigners. They readily accepted the criticism of Unifor and were very interested in the UAW contract coming up in the US next month. They were very concerned what additional concessions from the UAW would mean for their conditions, which they described as already terrible. The workers asked a campaigner to give them more leaflets to pass out to their coworkers.

A security guard was sent out to threaten campaigners with arrest if they did not leave company property. After they moved to a bus stop where the second-tier workers—many whose wages are so low they cannot afford cars—were waiting, the security guard came over insisting leaflets could not be passed out there either.

At that point a young worker came over to the campaigner and declared, “Give me a bunch, I’ll pass them out!” A young worker at one of the retail shops near the plant spoke with the WSWS about what it would mean for Brampton’s 524,000 residents if the factory was closed. “A big portion of residents around here are Chrysler workers,” he said. “They also support these shops. When they come off of their shift they stop and buy things here. One of the owners says he makes \$4,000 a day just on smokes.

“You can see what happens when they close factories. Detroit is done, already only 20 percent of Detroit is actually a city. These guys stay in business by undercutting the ones that built up the companies.”

He also said the unions do not unite workers, rather “they divide them—they don’t care. The bottom line is the dollar. Whoever gets it cheaper, that’s where they’ll put the plant. Give it ten years and everything will be automated. There will only be a few hundred guys in there.”

Commenting on what the younger generation is facing, he said, “It’s going to be harder for us—that’s

guaranteed.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact