

Canadian and US autoworkers call for a united struggle against GM's assault on jobs

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Since the transnational automotive giant General Motors announced on Monday that it plans to close five plants in the United States and Canada in 2019, and two more plants in unspecified locations, the political establishment and trade unions have stepped up their efforts to fan the poisonous flames of nationalism to divide and pit workers against one another and prevent any fight against GM's attacks.

Among workers, however, there is widespread support for a joint struggle across national lines against the globally organized corporation.

In Windsor, Ontario, just across the international border with Michigan, Peter, a Fiat-Chrysler worker with 19 years, said the news of the plans to close the GM plant in Oshawa, Canada, as well as in Detroit, Michigan and Lordstown, Ohio, "has been going around like crazy. It's a fear for us because of the uncertainty. It's like one day you're working and the next you don't know what's going to happen. It's GM, but who's to say it won't be Ford or Chrysler next."

Peter said he thought workers should "fight together. We should stand together. There's no better way to make a stand than with high numbers. It doesn't matter what country you're from; it's the people who are working. Everyone wants to make a living. That's what it really comes down to: the working class is the one that has to pay."

There were previously two GM plants 10 years ago in Windsor. "Both of them were shut down, and all that's left is a Chrysler and Ford plant. You never know who's next." As far as the company is concerned, "there's never apparently enough money for them. They just made billions. It's like the modern grief factor: Everyone has to suffer in order for the big guys to get more in their pockets? How much is enough before you stop destroying jobs?"

The Canadian auto union Unifor, like its American counterpart the United Auto Workers, has promoted virulent nationalism for decades as a justification for its endless collaboration with the auto companies in imposing attacks on workers' jobs and benefits. "My parents both worked for GM years ago," Peter said. "They tell that when the unions first came out, they actually stood for something, for the workers. Now it's just a mixture of people who seem to be working for the company more than for the workers. It's like a smokescreen."

Matthew, who has been at the Ford Plant in Oakville, approximately 40 minutes west of Toronto in Ontario, for nine years, said that if "General Motors shuts down, Ford thinks they won't look as bad if they do the same thing. I read that Ford is going to be cutting back a huge chunk of their workforce."

He described his own experience with Unifor in collaborating with management over the past decade. "Companies at Ford and GM hand over envelopes to union officials, stack the cash, to make things go a lot smoother in these 'transitions,' like with a second-tier wage system," he said. At his plant, Ford has a 100-day rule, which allows the company to make changes to workers' jobs to fit the model after a new car is introduced.

"But the 100 days keeps getting extended and the union does nothing," he said. "I can be doing my job and then halfway through the year they can add five more jobs on my task, and I still only have 45 seconds in my area, so instead of putting two or three bolts in, you're doing eight, moving wires, clamping this down, etc. The union never stops them. They say everything is good." He said it was a "shining example" of "how things are done." "It makes you scratch your head. Sometimes it's just like, well what the hell is going on

here?”

Matthew said he thought there “needs to be more dialogue between workers internationally.” He responded to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*’s calling of a public meeting in Detroit on December 9 to organize a united struggle against GM’s assault by workers in Oshawa, Lordstown and Detroit. “If there’s something like what you’re doing and organizing a meeting in Detroit and figure out a plan to unite all workers together, that’s what I want,” he said.

He added that he thought there should be a “chat board to discuss what’s going on, on what the union officials are doing, and have open transparency so workers can see their banking and checking accounts. We have to be able to watch and see when there’s a motion that goes through and all of a sudden the union president is driving around a new BMW.”

At GM’s Detroit-Hamtramck Plant in Michigan, one of those slated to close next year, Pat, who has worked at GM for 18 years, left her shift on Friday evening in disgust at the collaboration of the UAW with the company. “They’re all in bed with one another,” she said. “We haven’t seen the union on the floor. I’m paying union dues and they just upped them for a ‘strike fund’ and never lowered it. The UAW is just so corrupt.”

“In 18 years,” she said, “I’ve been on strike for one day—in Georgia—and it was a stunt by the UAW that was never going to be anything.”

Pat said, “we should all walk out.” It had to be “all of GM,” including “with Fairfax [Kansas], Texas, and everywhere—that would make a statement. We should fight with Canada, absolutely. If it’s just one plant, it won’t work. The people that don’t have their plant closing yet need to stand up as well.”

“Something should happen,” she said. “We all have coworker pages on Facebook.”

Pat began working at GM in Georgia in 2000. In 2008, she lost her house in the financial crash. “I still had a GM job, so the bank said I couldn’t get out of the mortgage. Then the plant closed in Georgia.” She asked GM to allow her to move to Detroit, where she had a family home. “They said I had to move to Kansas. Then I came here two years ago.” Every time she was forced to move for GM, she lost thousands of dollars—“selling house, uprooting everything and starting all over. Now they want me to commute to

Flint or move to Texas, which is not an option.” Now she says she is working just to make up the money lost in her moves.

“We gave up our COLA [cost-of-living adjustments] and everything two years before the bankruptcy,” she said. “They asked the employees of GM to help the company. Then they went bankrupt and now the hourly people need help and where is the help for us? What happened to where you worked at one plant for 30 years and you had a union?”

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter urge workers and young people to attend the public meeting to fight the GM closures and layoffs. The meeting will be held on December 9 at 2 p.m. at Bert’s Entertainment Complex, 2727 Russell Street in Detroit. Let us know you are attending and share the meeting info with your friends on Facebook here.



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