

“A serious fightback will only develop through action initiated by the rank-and-file workers”

GM Oshawa workers speak out against plant closure

A WSWS reporting team
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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding an emergency meeting this Sunday, December 9 at 2 p.m. in Detroit to organize a fight against the plant closures. We urge all autoworkers to make plans to attend and organize delegations from your factories. Let us know you are attending and share the event on Facebook with your friends and co-workers.

The World Socialist Web Site spoke to autoworkers this week at the General Motors plant in Oshawa, Ontario who expressed frustration and anger both with the company and the Unifor union.

The Oshawa facility, which has been involved in auto production for a century, has been marked as one of five plants in the United States and Canada set for closure in the company's latest round of restructuring. Some 2,500 workers are threatened with permanent layoff in 2019 as part of 15,000 jobs axed in the overall plan.

Since the 1980s, when the plant was one of the largest auto assembly complexes in the world, about 21,000 workers have lost their jobs in a series of production cuts and wholesale line and plant shutdowns. Over the same period, one concession contract after another has significantly reduced the wages, benefits and pensions of the remaining workers while increasing the pace of work and instituting second and even third tier employment.

World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter reporters distributed a statement denouncing the role of the Unifor union in enforcing these cuts and concessions, and urged GM workers to form independent action committees to oppose the plant shutdown. "A fightback cannot be carried out through Unifor or the United Auto Workers (UAW)," the statement declared. "These organizations have long since ceased to be workers' organizations. They function as arms of corporate

management, suppressing worker resistance.

"For more than three decades, Unifor and the UAW have imposed round after round of concessions in the name of 'saving jobs,' while assisting the auto companies to pit workers in Canada and the US against each other."

After noting the unions' complicity in permitting the Detroit Three to cut its workforce by more than half since 2000, the statement went on, "In 2016, Unifor insisted workers had no choice but to make more sacrifices—including the further entrenchment of multi-tier wages—so as to 'secure' what Unifor President Jerry Dias hailed as 'guarantees' of the Canadian auto industry 'footprint.'"

"These claims now lie in tatters. The only ones who have benefited from the endless concessions are the corporate executives, Wall Street sharks, and high-paid Unifor bureaucrats."

Workers were eager to know what the WSWS had to say and to read the "Call to Action" leaflet that was distributed as they came off shift.

Cary has worked at several GM plants for the past 30 years, and has experienced a total of 11 years of lay-offs over that time. "I've seen the street a lot, I've even been in a spot where I didn't think that GM was going to be in my future," Cary told the WSWS. "I'm seeing that now all over again, it just seems to be a little more concrete. But we're not taking it lying down. We are going to do everything we can to get us a new product. It's the young people who are just starting their lives and they're being devastated right now."

Cary pointed to the brutal regime of exploitation enforced by GM. "We made a truck launch in six months. A record. We did the impossible. Nobody in the corporation thought we could pull this off. So, when they

shocked us with this, no allocation past 2019, that really blindsided us," he added.

Asked what he thought about the nationalist statements by Jerry Dias about Mexican workers taking jobs, Cary responded, "No, it's not the workers, it's the company that's doing it. That's why the company is there, to exploit people for their labor.

Julie has been working at GM since 2008. "I just got full-time when the contract came in 2016," she told us. "It's kind of depressing. Soon, 2,500 people in Oshawa are going to be without a job, plus more people with the feeder plant. It's kind of devastating. You know that GM is not going to be around—and I basically rely on GM to support my family. I have a five-year-old son."

Julie continued, "I think that the people in Mexico should have jobs as well. I feel that in Oshawa we make the best-quality vehicles and that we have for a hundred years. GM has made up their mind, and that's what they want to do."

She also ridiculed claims by Progressive Conservative Ontario Premier Doug Ford that he would assist laid-off workers. "Doug Ford says that he wants to give us an extra five weeks of unemployment insurance, but what's that going to do for us in the long run when we're not going to have a job at all?" said Julie. "Five weeks isn't going to be enough to support a family. There aren't a lot of job opportunities in Oshawa or even in the surrounding areas. Everything is rising, the price of food, clothes. I don't know how people are going to survive."

WSWS reporters also spoke to workers at a nearby Walmart. Grant said, "The unions now, they're a corporation too. It's ridiculous. People are saying the unions basically are autocracies at this point."

A worker who asked for anonymity for fear of victimization said, "I back you guys 100 percent. They went slave labour here. Every company is doing it. I work for a company that did the same thing. They went to China, and then they were looking at India as their next slave labour weapon.

"The government wrote off Chrysler's loan, they wrote off GM," added the worker, referring to the multibillion-dollar bailout for the auto companies orchestrated by the Federal Conservatives and Ontario Liberal government in 2009. "How many billion was it? \$10 billion GM got. It's ridiculous. They've taken advantage of everybody because the money the government gave them is our money, our tax dollars. We want something back for our tax dollars. We used to talk about what would happen if GM ever closed down. Oshawa would be a ghost town."

Sherry, who lives nearby and has family at GM, said, "I feel for the people, I really do. We are so dependent on GM that we are at their mercy. The unions have never helped us out. I think they were good at one time, but now I don't know.

"I really feel for people at minimum wage—14 bucks an hour is not enough. Back in my parents' time, the economy was meeting the wages of the people. You may have only made two bucks an hour but you could go and get a load of groceries. You can't do that now."

The WSWS also received written statements from Canadian readers of the *Autoworker Newsletter*. Frank, a veteran worker at the Windsor, Ontario, Fiat-Chrysler assembly plant, wrote, "The GM announcement is once again a move to drive up the price of GM stock.

"The closures will be devastating. In Ontario, it will be a tremendous blow, adding to the unemployment and underemployment problem that is now systemic in our province. Unifor's response has been mediocre. No plant picketing. No plant takeover. No action. So far it's all talk."

Bruce Allen, a retired veteran of GM's St. Catharines engine plant, wrote in support of this Sunday's fight back meeting in Detroit organized by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. "Fellow Workers, I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere hope that your meeting will be very successful and will facilitate meaningful, sustained opposition to these plant closures by General Motors," he stated.

"It is abundantly clear that a serious, effective fightback will only develop through action initiated by the rank and file workers and outside of the control of the union bureaucracies. It is imperative that this fightback also be supported by as many workers as possible employed by other auto and auto parts corporations including your counterparts in Canada and Mexico and beyond."



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