

FCA Canada to cut third shift at Windsor Assembly

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30 March 2019

Autoworkers are reacting with shock and anger to the announcement Thursday afternoon by Fiat Chrysler that it will lay off the third shift at its Windsor Assembly Plant in Canada. The cuts, to take place September 30, will eliminate about 1,500 jobs. The layoffs are permanent.

The Windsor plant, which builds the Chrysler Pacifica minivan and Dodge caravan, has operated on a three-shift schedule since 1993. The plant is the largest employer in Windsor, which has been devastated by the shutting down of auto production in the city, once called the automotive capital of Canada.

There are about 6,000 workers currently employed at the Windsor plant, which underwent retooling in 2015 to build the Pacifica. The plant can build up to 1,500 vehicles per day.

The job cuts are the latest shock in a wave of global downsizing in the auto industry. This week Ford announced the closure of its three factories in Russia, eliminating some 3,700 jobs. That follows its announcement of 5,000 Ford job cuts in Germany and the announcement by Goodyear-Dunlop of 1,100 job cuts in Germany.

The General Motors Oshawa, Ontario plant is set to close later this year as part of plans by GM to close five North American facilities and axe 15,000 jobs. FCA announced in February that it would lay off 1,300 workers at its Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant this spring.

On April 1, Ford will lay off 1,000 workers at its Flat Rock Assembly Plant south of Detroit.

Unifor officials claim to have been blindsided by the Chrysler layoff announcement. In a press conference Thursday, Windsor Unifor Local 444 President Dave Cassidy downplayed the layoffs, calling the cuts “strictly a business decision based on the Pacifica.” He

rejected any comparison to the impending shutdown of the Oshawa GM plant.

Meanwhile, right-wing Ontario Progressive Conservative Premier Doug Ford issued a demagogic statement claiming his administration “stood behind” Fiat Chrysler workers. He went on to boast that his administration was dedicated to boosting corporate profits. “Our government is lowering taxes, lowering electricity rates and slashing red tape. There has never been a better time for auto manufacturers to invest in the province of Ontario,” Ford declared.

The New Democratic Party also issued similar hollow statements of solidarity with Windsor autoworkers, while Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau’s Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Navdeep Bains, expressed his “disappointment” with FCA management.

Unifor is above all concerned with blocking an independent mobilization by workers against the devastating job cuts. Unifor officials moved in quickly to suppress a sitdown protest by Oshawa workers over the impending closure in January.

In place of a united struggle across national borders to defend jobs, Unifor has promoted a filthy anti-Mexican boycott aimed at pitting US and Canadian workers against their brothers to the south, who staged a historic walkout against maquiladora plants in Matamoros, Mexico earlier this year.

On March 19, Unifor President Jerry Dias suspended the union’s publicity campaign against the closure of the Oshawa plant after GM agreed to continue talks on the Oshawa shutdown. After initial bluster, Dias has now predictably accepted the closure of the Oshawa plant, seeking at most the maintenance of a skeleton crew along with more early retirement buyouts.

A worker at Windsor Assembly, who wished to

remain anonymous due to concerns over possible retaliation, spoke to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* about the layoff announcement.

“They [Unifor] knew about it. They had to know. The writing was on the wall. Orders are very low. We have a two-week layoff coming up starting next week.

“There has been too much going on in the plant. I find it ironic that talks with FCA in the US are coming up. I can see them being asked to take cuts. Unifor may try to save the third shift off our backs.”

The worker said that some 2,500 workers at the plant would not be eligible for supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB) that replace a portion of lost wages in the event of layoff.

“If they didn’t work us to death with overtime, we would be ok. We were working overtime until last summer, then it abruptly stopped.”

There are hundreds of temporary part time workers (TPTs) at Windsor Assembly. They earn about \$15 an hour less than senior workers and have no recall rights and are not eligible for SUB. Under terms of the FCA-Unifor contract, TPT workers are only supposed to work Friday, Saturday and Monday. However, Unifor has permitted management to use TPT workers six days a week.

The Windsor plant has already been temporarily shut down twice this year to “align production with demand.” The FCA Brampton plant also faces a temporary shutdown.

Asked about Premier Ford’s claim to oppose the layoffs, the Windsor Assembly worker replied, “PC, NDP, Liberal, they are all the same.”

Sales of the Pacifica, which retails for around \$60,000, have been lagging as consumers opt for less pricey vehicles. A February report showed that sales of the Pacifica were down 60 percent.

Fiat Chrysler reported \$4.1 billion in profits in 2018, up 3 percent, due to record global sales of its Jeep and Ram vehicles. Sales were up more than 15 percent in the fourth quarter of 2018.

In moving forward with more layoffs, Fiat Chrysler is answering the call of wealthy investors, who are demanding a greater rate of profit be extracted off the sweat and toil of workers.

Unifor will use the threat of impending layoffs to attempt to browbeat Chrysler workers into accepting further concessions. Just as it is trying to separate the

fight of Oshawa and Windsor autoworkers, Unifor is seeking to stoke up anger against workers in the US and Mexico in order to divide and weaken the fight of autoworkers.

The experience of the past 40 years has demonstrated that the program of concessions endlessly promoted by the unions has never saved a single job. No credence either can be given to the professions of support by the big business politicians.

Only the independent political and industrial mobilization of the working class can defend jobs. Workers must advance a program based on the defense of workers’ needs, not the profit interests of the corporations, including the abolition of tiers, the hiring of all TPT workers as full time and the recall of laid off workers.

The Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* organized a February 9 demonstration at GM headquarters in Detroit against plant shutdowns. It called for the building of rank-and-file factory committees independent of the UAW and Unifor and the unity of US, Canadian and Mexican workers in a common struggle to defend jobs.

We urge Windsor Assembly workers to contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to discuss the waging of such a fight.



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