

# Halt the jobs massacre in the UK auto industry: For a joint struggle at Honda, Nissan, Ford and Vauxhall

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Last Monday saw the announcement that the Honda Logistics facility in Swindon would close in 2021, destroying the jobs of its 1,200-strong workforce.

On Thursday, Gianluca de Ficchy, chairman of Nissan Europe said a no-deal Brexit—the UK leaving the European Union’s Single Market and Customs Union without an agreement—would place “the entire business model for Nissan Europe ... in jeopardy,” threatening the jobs of 7,000 at its Sunderland plant.

In April this year, Honda announced the closure of its main production plant in Swindon, also set for 2021, costing 3,500 jobs. Then in June, Ford said it was shutting its Bridgend engine plant in autumn 2020 with the loss of 1,700 jobs. In July, Vauxhall threatened to move production out of its Ellesmere Port plant if Brexit made it unprofitable, destroying 1,000 jobs.

The livelihoods of an estimated 12,000 others currently employed in the Honda supply chain locally in Swindon and further afield are at risk. According to one analyst, the closure of the Honda plant would remove £2.4 billion from the economy in the South West, devastating many local businesses and services dependent on the wages of those working in the factory—70 percent of whom live in Swindon. They estimate that total job losses could easily reach 17,000, approximately 8 percent of the town’s population.

According to one estimate, the Nissan plant in Sunderland supports another 30,000 jobs in Britain.

At a stroke, some 15,000 jobs of those employed directly in the UK auto industry face the axe. Including those working in the wider supply chain, this potentially threatens the pay packets of some 75,000 people, almost 9 percent of the jobs in the sector.

The misery that would result from such an assault

would be profound. The cuts to the welfare system mean those who lose their jobs are forced to exist on a pittance or must accept minimum wage “McJobs.” Those with mortgages face falling behind in their repayments, and the threat of repossession by the banks and mortgage companies.

Confronted by such a jobs massacre, the trade unions’ protracted opposition to mounting any fightback is a bitter indictment of their role as co-managers and company policemen, whose real function is to ensure nothing threatens the smooth running of industry. In Swindon, Unite General Secretary Len McClusky told car workers in March, “We are not going to let this [the plant closure] happen, not without a fight.” But far from organising a fight to defend jobs, Unite officials have negotiated redundancy terms for the closure of the Honda plant, selling off the jobs of future generations.

Speaking outside the Honda Logistics facility, one union official told a WSWs reporter that “the decision has been taken by Honda, what can you do? We’ve negotiated the best redundancy package, and nobody wants a fight.”

In this way, the union seeks to demobilise and dishearten workers that would be prepared to fight by telling them this is the “best deal available” and that “nothing can be done” to change Honda’s decision. This is a lie! Workers at Honda and throughout the auto industry must reject the false arguments employed by trade union bureaucrats such as McCluskey to justify their own betrayal.

Car workers all over the world—in Europe, in the US and in Asia—confront the same transnational corporations. Everywhere, they are told by

management, echoed by the unions, that only through sacrificing jobs, pay and conditions can the profitability of the company be ensured, and future employment secured.

In a rare moment of honesty, when addressing the demonstration that had followed the announcement of the closure, Honda convener Danny Brennan said the union had “bailed the company out in good times and bad.” Such a policy has not protected a single job anywhere. On the contrary, it only guarantees that plants and factories are closed without facing any opposition.

In the US, 48,000 autoworkers at General Motors (GM) have been on all-out strike for more than four weeks in a fight to win back lost wages and benefits, end the hated tier system that pays newer hires half pay for doing the same job, secure permanent status for all temps and defeat attacks on health care. All these “concessions” had been accepted by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union.

As the WSWS writes, the critical issue autoworkers face is “breaking the isolation imposed by the UAW and extending the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler as the first step in mobilizing the working class across the US and internationally against the drive by the international banks and corporations to reduce workers to at-will temps with no rights and poverty wages.”

The same issues confront car workers in the UK and all over the world. The trade unions have deliberately isolated and separated the workforce at the Honda production plant and at the logistics facility, rather than seeking to mobilise a joint struggle.

With or without Brexit, the world economy is sinking deeper into crisis, with production slumping in the US, Germany and in Britain. This is particularly acute in the automotive sector, which also faces a bitter competitive struggle to develop new electric vehicles. According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), UK car manufacturing has fallen by a fifth in first half of 2019, “with the June decline marking 13 consecutive months of negative growth.”

After years in which the giant auto manufacturers have seen their profits grow, they are now seeking to place the burden of the crisis and the transition to electric onto the backs of the workers by cutting jobs, pushing down wages and diluting conditions.

Workers at Honda should follow the example of their

American brothers and sisters and launch a struggle in opposition to job cuts and factory closures.

However, as in the US, workers in Britain can place no confidence in the trade unions to conduct such a fight, which must be led by independent rank-and-file factory committees. Such committees will forge links to workers at other car manufacturers, at Nissan, Ford and Vauxhall, and coordinate a common struggle, also in conjunction with autoworkers in the US and around the world.



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