

Ford Canada announces more job cuts as GM prepares final shutdown in Oshawa

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Following the elimination of 200 jobs in September at Ford Canada's assembly plant in Oakville, Ontario, the company announced on Monday that an additional 450 jobs will be slashed in February 2020.

The announcement is part of an ongoing \$11 billion global restructuring program initiated by Ford last year.

The job cuts in Oakville follow on the heels of poor third-quarter results posted by the parent company last week that saw Ford stock plummet by 7 percent as Wall Street sends a message to Ford to ensure deep concessions in the US United Auto Worker (UAW) contract now under negotiation.

Ford, as well as the rest of the global auto firms, are positioning themselves for a significant economic downturn in the coming years.

Ford announced last year that 12,000 production jobs will be cut in 2020 at its European operations. In addition, the company has already cut its global salaried workforce by 70,000. Ford CEO James Hackett, whose personal compensation rose 6 percent to almost \$18 million last year, calls the job-cutting program, Ford's "Smart Redesign."

The announcement in Oakville, where 4,400 production workers are employed, also signaled Ford management's opening shot as it prepares for 2020 contract negotiations with Unifor in Canada while simultaneously seeking to intimidate American workers in the current contract negotiation with the UAW.

All of the Detroit Three auto companies have collaborated with Unifor and the UAW in the nationalist whipsawing of new investment possibilities in the North American market in order to gut wages, benefits and working conditions during contract negotiations in every jurisdiction.

For decades, the UAW, Unifor and Unifor's predecessor the Canadian Auto Workers, which carried

out a nationalist split from the UAW in 1985, have pitted Canadian and US autoworkers against each other. Both unions have imposed round after round of wage, job and benefit cuts in the name of defending "American" or "Canadian" jobs.

This whipsaw strategy has failed to save a single job, either in Canada or the US. Instead, it has played directly into the hands of the auto bosses, who took advantage of the globalization of production to shift factories to the location with the lowest bidder in terms of labour costs.

On Monday, Unifor President Jerry Dias gave a brief statement in reaction to the Oakville layoff announcement. "New or expanded vehicle allocation," he said, "is urgently needed to prevent permanent job loss at the Ford Oakville plant."

Local Oakville union President Dave Thomas added, "For months Unifor has been urging Ford to come up with a plan to avoid this scenario. Ford was aware the Ford Flex and Lincoln MKT were coming to the end of their production life-cycle."

Ford Canada has not made any new product commitments for Oakville. Last July, when an earlier round of layoffs was announced, Thomas meekly bowed to the 200 job cuts, telling the membership, "As always, it's based on a business decision and it all comes down to dollars and cents."

In any event, product and investment "commitments" made by the corporations and cynically sold to the membership by Unifor are not worth the paper they are printed on.

At GM Oshawa, Unifor pushed through a concessions contract in 2016 that Dias insisted guaranteed a GM footprint in Oshawa at least through 2020. Yet GM announced last fall that assembly production at the facility would be permanently shuttered in 2019.

Over the past winter, autoworkers witnessed the phony fire-and-brimstone pontification of Dias promising that Unifor would not accept the closure of the Oshawa plant. This was accompanied by a vicious anti-Mexican campaign, including a call for the boycott of GM vehicles assembled in Mexico.

Today, as workers begin returning to the plant after a five-week furlough due to the GM strike in the US, only a few weeks of work remain until assembly production ceases for good, ending employment for 2,300 workers.

At GM's CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, a scheduled week-long shutdown to adjust for declining Equinox sales earlier this month will be followed by several more temporary furloughs in the coming months. Dias recently gloated that because a third shift at a Mexican plant also producing the Equinox will be permanently shut down, ending employment for over a thousand impoverished Mexican autoworkers, that CAMI workers should be proud of their union for overseeing more limited impacts in Ingersoll.

At Windsor's Fiat-Chrysler assembly operation, 1,500 workers out of 6,000 at the plant have just been laid off due to FCA's ending of the Pacifica models' third shift. The dwindling popularity of minivans has prompted industry analysts to suggest that more layoffs may ensue.

In 2015, FCA retooled the Windsor facility for Pacifica production before axing the workers four years later. As in the case of the Unifor response to the Oakville layoffs, Windsor Local 444 President Dave Cassidy downplayed the announced layoffs, calling the cuts "strictly a business decision based on the Pacifica."

The layoffs in Canada are just the most recent results of a deepening downturn in the global auto industry. The just concluded GM-UAW contract cemented the closure of four GM facilities. The company recently also closed an assembly operation in South Korea. FCA cashiered 1,400 workers this past summer at its Belvedere plant near Chicago.

Ford has closed three assembly plants in Russia, one in Brazil and laid off 5,000 workers in Germany. Honda is closing its plant in England and reducing production in Turkey, axing another 5,000 jobs. Jaguar Land Rover is laying off 4,500 across its global footprint.

An August report by Bank of Montreal Capital Markets noted that year-over-year auto production in Canada has been reduced by 7.8 percent. In the first half of 2019, Canadian auto production slipped to levels not seen since the 2008-2009 Great Recession. Vehicle production in Canada is now one-third less than its peak in 1999, representing today only 12 percent of all auto production in North America.

The global restructuring of the auto industry, and the accompanying jobs massacre that is well under way, must be opposed based on a socialist and international strategy. Against the divide-and-conquer nationalist program of the unions, autoworkers in Canada must link up with their class brothers and sisters in North America, Europe, South America and Asia to prepare a global fight back against the auto companies.



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