

As GM moves to expand production at Oshawa, Ontario facility UAW promotes anti-Canada nationalism

Shannon Jones
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The announcement by General Motors that it will invest \$1.3 billion in its Oshawa, Ontario, plant to begin pickup truck production there has been met with push-back from local United Auto Workers officials in the US, who are stoking fears that US workers will lose jobs. The announcement of the Oshawa retooling was part of the recent contract settlement between GM and the Canadian Unifor union.

Due to high demand for the Chevy Silverado and GMC Sierra pickups, GM has decided to build additional vehicles at the currently mothballed Oshawa facility, which is currently operating with a skeleton crew stamping parts. The move by GM will reportedly result in up to 2,500 new jobs phased in beginning in January 2022.

Due to the pandemic and the temporary shutdown of auto production, GM's best-selling trucks are in short supply. Further, high worker absentee rates due to fear of contracting COVID-19 has made it impossible to keep up with the demand.

The Oshawa plant stopped auto production last year as part of a GM austerity plan that axed five plants in the US and Canada. Both the Canadian Unifor union and the UAW blocked any struggle against the closures. For its part Unifor shut down militant protests by Oshawa workers and sought to divert anger over job losses into an overtly racist campaign scapegoating brother autoworkers in Mexico. Meanwhile, both Unifor and the UAW blacked out news of the heroic strike by brutally exploited maquiladora workers in Matamoros, Mexico.

Now the UAW is promoting a similar campaign against Canadian autoworkers. In remarks quoted in the *Detroit News*, Rich LeTourneau, UAW plant chairman

at the GM Fort Wayne, Indiana, light truck plant, expressed concern that reopening the Oshawa plant could threaten US jobs. "I know how this works when you have too many plants budgeted the same. There has to be a volume reduction somewhere. Where does that hit?" Noting that Fort Wayne also makes the Silverado and Sierra he expressed disappointment that GM ignored his proposals for squeezing more production out of Fort Wayne autoworkers.

Another UAW official, Eric Welter, Local 598 plant chairman at the GM Flint Truck plant, said, "People work very hard, a lot of weekends to make all of this product. To have it sourced somewhere else, we don't know what that means for the future ... it's a little disappointing they didn't give us a chance at increasing our line speed versus retooling another plant."

Nothing could more clearly expose the anti-worker, fratricidal logic of the nationalist program of the unions, which pits worker against worker in a never-ending downward spiral of lower wages and worsening conditions. It should be pointed out that the UAW and Unifor have enforced full production schedules and suppressed rank-and-file opposition to GM's disregard for the health and safety of workers in the midst of the pandemic.

After stabbing the Oshawa workers in the back, permitting the shutdown of the plant last year and forcing senior workers into taking buyouts or retirement, Unifor has now cut a deal that will allow GM to staff the new light truck operation largely with lower-paid tier-two and part-time workers at an enormous cost savings to management. In addition, there is every reason to believe that Unifor President Jerry Dias has made concessions on work rules that are

being kept hidden from workers.

To further promote cost competition between US and Canadian autoworkers, Dias insisted on a common expiration date for workers at the Detroit car companies on both sides of the border. This would allow the auto companies to “comparison shop” between UAW and Unifor concession offers.

Unifor worked closely with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on negotiating the reactionary United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) ratified earlier this year. The trade deal is part of a strategy to further drive down wages with the aid of the unions, as part of the creation of a North American trading bloc, headed by the US, that will be “competitive” with lower-wage areas, particularly China.

In remarks to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, a veteran worker at the Fort Wayne truck plant expressed disgust with the UAW’s whipping up animosity toward Canadian workers. “I support unity with global autoworkers. Not being united is what puts all of us in the current position where the corporations plays each group of workers against each other. Global whipsawing is all it is and the unions fall right into it.

“The unions seem completely content giving in to the corporations’ demands for more production at a cheaper cost. All the while the corporations are making record profits. There is not a lot left to give. The union at Fort Wayne doesn’t have much room to talk. Just recently they gave away some members’ break periods to keep the line moving. Nothing was given to those workers in return and they didn’t even have a say in it.”

In contrast to the anti-Canadian and anti-Mexican demagoguery spewed by the UAW, US GM workers during their historic 40-day strike in 2019 were enthusiastic on hearing from the *Autoworker Newsletter* of the support given their struggle by brother GM workers in Silao, Mexico. Seven Silao GM workers were fired after issuing a call to support US workers by refusing overtime at the plant that also builds the Silverado and Sierra pickup trucks. The victimization was engineered by management in collaboration with the corrupt Confederation of Mexican Workers union.

One Flint worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter* during the strike, “I believe it is the workers of the world that are going to have to unite against the big

corporations. It’s not just the US anymore, or the Canadian workers, I believe it is all of us in the same fight.”

Dan, another Flint GM worker, said, “We make the same truck as they do in Silao, and I think their wages must be very low. I heard about them refusing to increase their production when we went on strike. And now they’re fired? That’s not right.

“I want to thank those workers for their stand and we defend them. It’s a global economy. So I think we need a global strike. We all face the same thing. We’re fighting to get everything back GM took from us.”

US autoworkers must reject the foul America First nationalism promoted by the UAW, which is aimed at dividing US, Canadian and Mexican workers. Whatever their nationality, race or ethnicity, all workers are exploited by the same transnational corporations and share common interests. The *Autoworker Newsletter* seeks to forge the closest unity between workers globally in opposition to the divide-and-rule strategy of the auto companies and the unions. Workers must restore the principle that an injury to one is an injury to all.

This requires an organizational and political break with the pro-capitalist unions. Already the Socialist Equality Party and the *Autoworker Newsletter* have assisted in the building of rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the unions, in a number of plants based on the principle that the needs of workers, including the right to a healthy work environment, must take priority over profits. We encourage autoworkers who want to join this fight to contact the *Autoworker Newsletter* for more information about building a rank-and-file safety committee at your plant.



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