

Stellantis slashes 1,800 auto jobs at Windsor Assembly in Canada

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Stellantis, the global auto giant and parent company of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles Canada, announced Friday evening that it will indefinitely lay off 1,800 workers at the company's Windsor Assembly Plant in Windsor, Ontario, just across the international border from Detroit, Michigan. The layoffs will be accompanied by the elimination of the plant's second shift effective April 17, 2022.

"The global automotive industry continues to face significant headwinds such as the persisting semiconductor shortage and the extended effects of the COVID-19 pandemic," the company stated in justifying the jobs massacre. "In response to these factors, Stellantis will adjust production operations at its Windsor Assembly Plant."

The statement went on to declare that the company's promised \$1.3 billion to \$1.5 billion investment to move production to electric vehicle models in Windsor by 2024 was unaffected by their layoff announcement.

Certainly, the global shortage of semiconductors has temporarily affected auto production. In Canada, volumes have dropped by almost 7 percent over the past year. Many of the remaining assembly plants in the country have produced only sporadically since last February. Windsor Assembly, for instance, has operated for only 3 months in 2021. Stellantis' Brampton Assembly Plant has seen significant downtime as well. Ford, General Motors, Toyota and Honda operations have been similarly impacted. GM's CAMI assembly plant near London, Ontario—one of the hardest hit—has only operated for three weeks in the past 9 months.

That being said, Stellantis' attempt to sell the layoffs in Windsor as a mere response to unexpected supplier issues is a cynical fraud. The reality is that well before last January's merger of FCA with the PSA group, which includes Peugeot, Opel, and Vauxhall, that formed Stellantis, corporate management were plotting a massive onslaught on workers' jobs and conditions around the world.

Noting that Stellantis employed some 410,000 workers on almost every continent when it was formed, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, "The merger of FCA and PSA

has been driven by the ferocious struggle among the auto giants to dominate both new technologies, including electric and autonomous vehicles, and markets. The tie-up will itself push other companies to seek out further consolidation and cost savings. The major banks and investors have exerted relentless pressure on automakers in recent years to accelerate cuts and restructuring plans, with the aim of squeezing out every drop of profits possible from the working class."

Carlos Tavares, who heads the Stellantis group, is notorious as a cost-cutting restructurer. He is responsible for the destruction of thousands of auto jobs across PSA's European operations in France, Germany, and Britain, and he is now imposing similar attacks globally to ensure Stellantis can make bumper shareholder payouts and outcompete its rivals in the rapidly expanding EV market.

The job cuts at the Windsor plant, which builds the Chrysler Pacifica minivan, Pacifica Hybrid, Grand Caravan, and Chrysler Voyager, will reduce the workforce to around 2,200 this coming spring. The plant has for years been the largest employer in Windsor, which has been devastated by a steady reduction of auto production in the city, once called the automotive capital of Canada. As late as 2020, the plant employed almost 6,000 autoworkers over three shifts. About 1,500 workers were then axed with the elimination of the third shift.

At that time, officials from Unifor, the union which represents workers at the plant, refused to mobilize autoworkers to oppose the layoffs. Talking like a corporate executive, Unifor Local 444 President Dave Cassidy said the destruction of the third shift was "strictly a business decision based on the Pacifica."

On Friday, Unifor National President Jerry Dias justified the layoffs in much the same way Stellantis did. "The computer chip fiasco has caused all kinds of turmoil," he said. "It leaves all of the companies evaluating their priorities. The unfortunate reality is that pickup trucks, SUVs are where they're hanging their hat. And it's a disaster for us because we bargained something much

different (minivans). But you can't control where the market is at as the result of the computer chips. It's a mess. I'm frankly so disappointed."

This is nothing but a pathetic apologia for Unifor's central role in blocking any opposition by autoworkers in Canada to the global restructuring plans of the major automakers. During last year's round of collective bargaining with the Detroit Three, Dias and his teams of negotiators facilitated the massive onslaught on jobs and working conditions by campaigning for the provincial and federal governments to fork over hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies to FCA, Ford, and GM to ensure Canada's "competitiveness" as a destination for new investments. They combined this with a doubling down on their promotion of rotten Canadian nationalism, telling autoworkers in Windsor, Oakville, and Brampton that their jobs could only be secured by competing in a race to the bottom with their class brothers and sisters in the United States, Mexico, and internationally.

When bargaining concluded last fall, Dias postured as the savior of the Canadian auto industry, claiming that the Detroit Three's commitment of around \$5 billion in future investments to manufacture electric vehicles in Ontario guaranteed secure, decent-paying jobs for autoworkers. The elimination of the second shift at Windsor, coming little more than a year after the third shift was axed, puts paid to such bluster. Insofar as the auto industry in Canada is being "saved" it is at the expense of auto workers and the communities in which they work and live. The only ones to profit from this are the automakers and their super-rich shareholders along with their advisers and co-managers in the Unifor bureaucracy.

Last year's collective agreement between FCA and Unifor, which Dias' described as the "best deal in 25 years," sought to fool the membership into accepting sweeping retrenchment with headline promises of large investments. Management's promise to invest up to \$1.5 billion to re-tool Windsor Assembly for electric car production projected about 2,000 jobs slowly coming back on stream over several years.

But as the WSWS warned workers, "FCA's letter of intent to Unifor sums up the uncertainty that remains over the automaker's plans. FCA asserted that any investments would be predicated on 'competitive operational practices' and 'appropriate government financial support to build a strong viable business case for future investments.' The letter then continued by stating that all investments 'are subject to the two key conditions in the preceding paragraph and, as always, to market demand, consumer preferences, company business plan requirements, group executive committee approval and economic conditions.'"

The key clause to draw attention to here, as the WSWS did

at the time, is the need for "group executive committee approval" for any job guarantees. Under conditions where the Stellantis group was emerging, it proves that Unifor knowingly reached an agreement that created the perfect conditions for the auto giant to launch its long-planned onslaught on jobs and conditions, all the while lulling its members to sleep with bogus propaganda about how their future employment was secure.

To oppose this corporate-union conspiracy and defend their jobs, autoworkers at the Windsor plant and across Canada must take matters into their own hands. They need to establish rank-and-file committees to oppose Unifor's nationalist, pro-corporate agenda, and unify their struggle for decent-paying, secure jobs with their international colleagues at auto plants across the United States, Mexico, Europe, and elsewhere.

Autoworkers in Canada can draw on the powerful example set by tens of thousands of workers in the United States who are in open revolt against the corporations and the bosses' junior partners in the unions. The brutal working conditions and rotten contract offers that are policed by the UAW and USW have been rejected in recent months by workers at Volvo Trucks, Dana auto parts, and John Deere. The rebellion by over 10,000 workers at Deere has led to the first strike at the agricultural equipment manufacturer in 35 years. It is the largest of a series of job actions by workers across the country that is developing into the biggest strike wave of the American working class in decades.

Workers at these companies have established rank-and-file committees independently of the corrupt unions to mobilize the most powerful force in the world on a global scale, the working class. We strongly encourage Stellantis workers in Windsor to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today to learn more about how to start a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.



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