

GM halting production at Ontario EV assembly plant due to battery shortage, once again throwing workers' lives into chaos

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Global automaker GM announced on Friday that it will halt production at the CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario from mid-October until springtime next year due to a shortage of the batteries required for building BrightDrop electric delivery vehicles. Approximately 1,100 workers out of the 1,500 at the facility outside London will be affected by the shutdown, throwing their lives and those of their families once again into extreme uncertainty.

The impending idling of the facility, whose workforce are employed under a separate contract from the rest of the Detroit Three's operations in Canada, comes just three months after a two-week shutdown in July due to a battery shortage. The announcement was made less than a year after the launch of electric vehicle (EV) production at the facility. The plant was subject to a months-long shutdown in 2022 after GM moved production of the Chevrolet Equinox from the Ontario plant to Mexico in April last year. Prior to that, the plant was shut down in 2020 during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic and suffered repeated production stops and starts in 2021 due to a shortage of semi-conductor chips.

A worker at the plant who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* said that it was estimated

that they had only worked 70 weeks in the last three years. "People have had it bad for the last three years," he explained. "There are a lot of married couples who work in the plant and they are both going to lose their jobs. People who have mortgages and kids are in big trouble. There is a Supplemental Unemployment Benefit (SUB) program for people depending on how much you work. But many people have already burned through their supplementary pay."

Throughout most of 2022, CAMI workers had to subsist on Employment Insurance, SUB pay and food banks amid a surging cost of living crisis. Many exhausted their savings and racked up credit card debt just to survive, as GM retooled the plant for EV production with the support of \$518 million in public funds provided by the governments of Tory Ontario Premier Doug Ford and federal Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Since the plant reopened in December, workers have been on rotating shifts, working two weeks on and then four weeks off. As of last week, the plant was only receiving enough batteries to produce 25 vehicles per shift, despite having a capacity for as many as 73.

The plant has been reliant on batteries which are assembled at the Ultium Cells plant in Lordstown, Ohio, but there have been repeated shortages due to production issues at that facility which opened last year. A 400,000 square foot battery assembly facility is currently under construction at CAMI to take pressure off the Lordstown plant but is not expected to be completed and fully operational until the second quarter of 2024.

The permanent insecurity for CAMI workers produced by repeated shutdowns and a lack of support during the EV transition is what awaits all autoworkers in Canada if the Detroit Three and their accomplices in the Unifor bureaucracy get their way. Under pressure from rank-and-

file workers, who have expressed concern about the miserable conditions facing CAMI workers, Unifor has been forced to make a show of fighting for income protection during EV production plant changeovers in the current bargaining round. But the union has demonstrated its firm commitment to the implementation of the EV transition at the expense of autoworkers so as to protect the automakers' massive profits.

Unifor has enthusiastically supported massive handouts of public funds to the big auto companies in the transition to EV production, including most recently \$30 billion for battery plants to be built in southwestern Ontario by Stellantis and Volkswagen. But the union bureaucracy has done virtually nothing to support workers through the turmoil, aside from haggling with GM over SUB pay, or to warn them about the jobs bloodbath which is being planned. Unifor also champions the economic protectionist agenda advanced by the ruling elites in America and Canada in a bid to corner the rapidly growing EV market for themselves. These policies, including the on-shoring of supply chains for raw materials critical to EV production, are inseparable from the waging of imperialist wars by Ottawa and Washington around the world against their great-power rivals.

While pledging to save "Canadian jobs," the union bureaucracy has enforced one concession after another at CAMI. The plant has continually shed jobs, declining from 2,800 hourly workers in 2017 to just over 1,100 today. A month-long strike in 2017 was sold out by Unifor's since disgraced ex-president Jerry Dias, who forced through a four-year deal which maintained the hated two tier system for wages and benefits and did nothing to ensure job security. Then in 2021 Unifor prematurely reopened the CAMI contract agreeing to further concessions on jobs in the EV refit.

Workers at the CAMI plant, a subsidiary of GM opened in 1989 in partnership with Suzuki, remain separated in contract bargaining from their brothers and sisters at GM's other Canadian facilities, including the Oshawa assembly plant, and the rest of the Detroit Three—Stellantis and Ford. The contract at CAMI is set to expire on September 17, 2024, exactly one year after the ongoing struggle at the Detroit Three.

Just as Unifor keeps CAMI workers separated from their Canadian brothers and sisters, it is also working to keep workers in Canada separated from their colleagues at the Detroit Three in the United States. Despite a common expiration of contracts this month, and like demands from rank-and-file workers for improved wages, pensions, the

abolition of multi-tiers and enhanced job protection, Unifor president Lana Payne has insisted that Canadian workers have distinctly different interests from American workers. She has repeatedly declared that Unifor will "chart our own course" separate from the 150,000 autoworkers in the US whose contracts expired September 14.

With its announcement early Tuesday morning to arbitrarily extend the contract at Ford by 24 hours to block a strike, Unifor has betrayed the will of the 5,600 Ford workers who voted by nearly 99 percent to walk off the job when their contract expired at 11:59 p.m. Monday. "Charting our own course" has also meant that Payne has been coordinating with UAW President Sean Fain to ensure that Canadian auto workers do not add fuel to the determination of rank-and-file workers in the US to beat back decades of concessions. Unifor's ultimate aim is to aid the companies by sabotaging workers' struggles and demoralizing them into accepting yet another round of concessions in order to pump out record profits.

"What I worry about is if this doesn't go well with the Canadian Detroit Three," the CAMI worker told the WSWS. "Because we are offset we are going to go on strike alone and no one is going to want to go on strike because of the experience of Covid, retooling and the supply chain shenanigans. We need COLA [Cost of Living Adjustment], better benefits, to turn 8 year grow in into a 6 year grow in. It should be able to be a job you can get and take care of your family with. Its been seven straight bad years."

Workers at CAMI and throughout the Detroit Three in Canada must form rank-and-file committees to take the initiative into their own hands, to unite their struggles and wage a fight in coordination with autoworkers in the United States, Mexico and around the world to win what they need and not what the auto bosses and union bureaucrats say they can afford. This should include workers' control over the transition to EVs to ensure that these technological advances are used to improve the lives of workers and not to line the pockets of millionaire corporate executives and billionaire shareholders.



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