

Italy's Stellantis confirms end of Maserati Levante production

Marc Wells**13 February 2024**

Following three days of wildcat strikes and protests last week at Stellantis' historic Mirafiori plant in Turin, Italy, the transnational automotive corporation is moving ahead with its job-cutting campaign. The company has informed workers that production of the Maserati Levante luxury SUV at the factory will end on March 31.

The walkouts last week were triggered by the announcement by Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares that the Mirafiori plant, along with the Pomigliano d'Arco plant near Naples, could be shut down. The company implemented a "temporary layoff" affecting 2,455 Mirafiori workers starting on February 12 and, supposedly, ending March 31, the same day as the termination of the Levante production.

Since 2016, the Mirafiori plant has produced Levante SUVs (which have a starting price of US\$104,000) at the rate of 25 per day. With the cancellation of the model only eight Maseratis per day will be produced, and they will be limited to the Ghibli, Quattroporte, GranTurismo and GranCabrio models.

The company is also reducing production of the slow-selling fully electric Fiat 500 subcompact at Mirafiori plant.

This will have a devastating impact on other auto parts and supplier companies, like the Lear Corporation in Turin, which supplies seats for Maserati and has already been subject to redundancy pay (*Cassa Integrazione*) at the end of 2023. Lear is in danger of being shut down, with 420 jobs on the line.

Italian autoworkers, like their brothers and sisters worldwide, stand in the crosshairs of a global restructuring of the auto industry. Layoffs and mass firings have accelerated in recent weeks, affecting thousands at Stellantis, Ford and GM plants in the US. In each case, the union bureaucracies have worked hand in hand to impose the job-cutting, demonstrating their compliance to the needs of corporate interests.

For years, workers on the Maserati lines at the Mirafiori plant have been subject to temporary layoffs. Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA), Stellantis' predecessor, placed 1,400 workers on redundancy pay in 2020. "We work 10 days every two months... many of my coworkers would like to work even in August to make up for the diminished salary," Maserati autoworker Giacomo Zulianello said in a 2020 interview.

Stellantis is implementing a policy of brutal restructuring and

cost-cutting as the company transitions to electric vehicles (EVs). Similar to his counterparts at the other global automakers, but perhaps most nakedly, Stellantis CEO Tavares has jetted from country to country demanding multi-billion-dollar incentive packages from national and local governments, threatening to devastate jobs if the money is not handed over.

In 2021, at the time of the FCA-PSA merger and his appointment as CEO of the newly founded Stellantis, he targeted high production costs in Italy compared to other European countries like France and Spain.

Now, Tavares is intensifying his efforts to extort government incentives. To this end, he is using Stellantis' excess production capacity to as a bargaining chip to demand substantial subsidies from governments. In the US, Tavares was able to secure state and federal subsidies to keep the Belvidere, Illinois Jeep plant open. In Italy he is demanding a subsidy of €1 billion for the production of 1 million EVs, according to media reports.

The response of the Italian government, presided over by fascist Georgia Meloni, has been of a reactionary, ultranationalistic character. It is demanding a stake in Stellantis equal to that of the French government, seeking to more directly determine the company's decisions and to participate in its profits, i.e., secure a greater proportion of the spoils produced from the exploitation of workers in Italy.

Stellantis is also expanding its electric drive modules production capacity by investing more than €100 million in a facility in Hungary, the third one for the corporation (the other two are in the US and France). These expensive transitions to EVs are triggering massive layoffs in correlated sectors. In Germany, Bosch is set to cut 1,200 jobs, while ZF predicts up to 12,000 layoffs.

The situation has escalated to the level of the European Union. European Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager has nominally taken a no-contest position, stating, "We don't have subsidies for European consumers to be able to buy zero-emission cars. Each Member State has different schemes and as long as they are not discriminatory, we cannot do anything."

In the last two weeks, Tavares has also signaled his interest in a consolidation strategy, with rumors of a possible

Stellantis/Renault SA merger, which Stellantis officials have thus far denied. Renault is also partly owned and controlled by the French state. The company is mired in a crisis, especially as it pertains to its attempt to target a valuation of €8-10 billion for Ampere, its EV business, which it is seeking to establish as a standalone enterprise.

Tavares is attempting to exploit the sharp economic and political divisions between the European governments to extract the biggest concessions from the capitalist states and the nationally based trade unions. The increasingly bitter conflicts among European states are further proof that Europe cannot be “united” on a capitalist basis, the *raison d'être* of the EU.

Workers will not find a solution in the anti-EU ultranationalism often evoked by the fascists behind Meloni and echoed by the trade unions. One by one the CGIL, CISL and UIL union confederations are calling for national protectionism, and for the collaboration of the union apparatus, Stellantis and Italian government—in other words, a policy of corporatism.

This bankrupt perspective only divides Italian workers from their class brothers and sisters throughout the continent and subordinates them to needs of their “own” capitalist class. And it always translates into further wage and benefit reductions, and further job cuts in the name of making Italian capitalism “more competitive.”

Edi Lazzi, FIOM-CGIL secretary in Turin, expressed concerns among the union bureaucracy that tensions may escape its grip: “When workers go on wildcat strikes it means the situation has reached the limit. There is no more time to waste, we must act immediately.” This is why he relies on the fascist Meloni government to suppress the rising tide of discontent: “The central government and the institutions must come up with ideas to confront this job challenge.”

Other top union officials sounded a similar note. UILM’s secretary Luigi Paone put forward Stellantis’ board of directors as a supposed ally, stating recently, “Today’s announcement brings to virtually zero Maserati production in Mirafiori.” He raised the “urgency to discuss with Stellantis and institutions on the plant’s mission.”

In social media comments, Tommaso Pirozzi, a 30-year veteran worker at the Pomigliano d’Arco plant, which is also at risk of closure, described the relationship between Tavares, the government and the unions. “At the time of Fiat, with [CEO Gianni] Agnelli, they first blackmailed the government with more than 50,000 redundancy pay claims, then [former CEO Sergio] Marchionne: who can forget what was done in Pomigliano as a dress rehearsal to a devastating elimination of labor rights?”

Focusing on the current situation, he continued, “Now, Tavares is demanding more money, following a trend throughout the years of stealing money from the population.” He sounded a strong critical tone: “This has happened with the approval of trade unions and all political forces; how else can

we explain the ongoing deindustrialization? It follows the logic of finance: make as much profit and leave dangers and leftover stock on the backs of workers.”

Criticizing the FIOM union, portrayed by the establishment as the most “radical” union, Pirozzi added, “They say FIOM is the only union saying ‘no’ to Meloni and Tavares. That’s false. FIOM is only giving that appearance. In reality, it’s telling the state to give the money [to Stellantis]... they [corporations] are all coming to plunder the state and the people.”

There are growing tensions among the ruling class: Vincenzo De Luca, a former Stalinist and current president of the Campania region where the Pomigliano plant is located, is very concerned about the explosive consequences of a shutdown in Pomigliano. Campania is an area that historically has been economically deprived and vilified.

De Luca has been posturing as an opponent of the government headed by the fascist Meloni. He has called for a mass demonstration in Rome on February 16, with the purpose of funneling more money to the South. But this regionalist approach effectively pits Pomigliano workers against their brothers and sisters in Mirafiori, not to mention those in other countries who are being affected by the same corporatist policies pursued by Tavares.

The fight forward cannot be left in the hands of the union bureaucracy. In Detroit last December, the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy pushed through the most recent contracts with the Big Three automakers, which has since triggered a wave of layoffs. In Germany last week, the IG Metall union agreed with Ford on the slashing of 3,500 workers at the Saarlouis plant. In Italy, union leaders are appealing to a fascist government.

The prerequisite for a successful struggle is the political independence of workers from both state and union bureaucracies, which are engaged in an inextricable marriage of interests. To this end, Italian and US workers must unite with all others in France, Germany and across the world in coordination with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), a network of militant workers’ organizations.



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