

Italian autoworker: “Build a strong class movement of workers internationally”

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Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares is engaged in a campaign of damage control, given the exposure of the company’s strategy to lay off swaths of autoworkers worldwide and extort subsidies from various governments in the interest of stockholders.

In a statement attempting to placate the massive anger building among workers against corporate interests and the fascist government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Tavares proclaimed, “Stellantis needs every Italian plant. There is no risk [of closure] for Pomigliano and Mirafiori plants.”

No autoworker believes this. The onslaught of jobs continues unabated globally, from the US to Italy and France.

At the same time Stellantis is expending €1.5 billion (\$1.6 billion) to acquire a 21 percent stake in the Chinese automaker Leapmotor, as the company seeks to catch up to and utilize China’s recent rapid advances in electric vehicle (EV) technology.

“If we have the opportunity because it makes economic sense to manufacture Leapmotors’ cars in Italy, of course, we will do,” Tavares said. He added, “It only depends on our cost competitiveness and our quality competitiveness.”

In the context of a slew of deaths on the job, including an accident last Thursday that killed a 52-year-old worker at the Stellantis Pratola Serra engine factory, workers’ anger is escalating, despite attempts by the Italian government and the trade unions to cover up the implications of the global restructuring taking place as automakers launch new models of production for EVs.

The WSWS recently spoke to Tommaso Pirozzi, a worker with 30 years at the Pomigliano d’Arco Stellantis plant, about his experiences. The Pomigliano factory, also known as the Giambattista Vico plant, is located in the metropolitan region surrounding Naples. It has been in operation since 1972 and currently builds the Fiat Panda, the Alfa Romeo Tonale and the Dodge Hornet.

WSWS: Can you share your experience in the last three decades as an autoworker?

Tommaso Pirozzi: I was hired in 1989 at the Pomigliano d’Arco plant. I was there until 2008. I am one of those workers deported 14 kilometers away to an office in Nola, because we were considered disruptive inside the plant. We were all part of grassroots unions. We were marginalized and discriminated against.

There was first an opinion of the Constitutional Court, then a ruling confirming that we had been discriminated against, and so we had to go back in. However, before the ruling came out, Fiat [now Stellantis] anticipated it and took us back to Pomigliano, and anyway once in Pomigliano we were not assigned a post, they kept us in warehouses away from production. I was in a warehouse where nothing was according to law regarding safety regulations, and we were there without any real task. I was sitting next to the boss. I never refused a job description, even though I certainly claimed rights.

So, if being on a job description meant huge saturations I would ask for evidence of regulations, and I always found things that were not up to standard and therefore could be challenged, which is why they never gave me a position. That’s why to this day I still don’t have a placement.

WSWS: Was this part of an industrial strategy?

TP: This was part of [former FCA CEO Sergio] Marchionne’s plan. As early as mid-2007 it was emerging that “black sheep” were being isolated from the “white sheep.” Later we understood. The “black sheep” were those individuals who did not conform to the dominant culture and had to be driven away. There were three or four suicides among us. Among them a woman, Maria Baratto. So, from 2008 until 2015 we were on “temporary” layoff (*Cassa Integrazione*).

At that time, I was the provincial secretary of the FLMU [UNI Autoworkers’ Federation], which adhered to the CUB [a “grassroots” trade union confederation]. So, we were always discriminated against for being militant.

WSWS: How do you view Tavares’ plan to extort governments in the billions of euros?

TP: How many billions is the Italian state willing to

provide to Stellantis, as it did with Marchionne? Billions in the form of incentives, tax breaks, *Cassa Integrazione* [layoffs]. We did almost 16 years between layoffs and reduced wages. Billions that the Italian state and taxpayers gave to Fiat. And Tavares is demanding the same.

Any investor comes to Italy with the idea of speculating, extorting money through blackmail, something all companies are doing. Big companies like Stellantis, Ilva. The state will continue to grant money, while companies will reduce staff and close some plants. It is not enough to attack Stellantis, you have to attack this kind of politics that is deindustrializing the country.

Labor costs in Europe are high because we demanded guarantees, a fair wage, which by the way is not so fair, but it allows us to survive. We demanded rights that are being gradually eliminated: just look at the deaths on the job in recent days. The Meloni government had said it would enforce the existing law, but in fact it did nothing. Some tried to frame the discussion on the definition of “murder at work” [as opposed to “accident on the job”], but she rejected it. In Milan, where there was a fatal accident last December [a 28-year-old worker crushed by a crane], there was only one inspector out of 6,000-7,000 companies.

WSWS: Do you think change can be implemented through present institutions, political parties or the so-called “left”?

TP: I say no. As Lenin said, the only possibility is to build a strong class movement of workers internationally capable of opposing the various governments that exist. Through the establishment you can’t change anything at all. The only possibility is to create a strong social opposition capable of affecting the various processes. The Renzi government gave Fiat to Marchionne; it was a fake-left government. Imagine what a right-wing government can do! They have done so much and continue to do so to privatize and liberalize; they’d never place any constraint on the free market, while the state gets involved just to uphold the appearance that jobs are not lost.

WSWS: What is the responsibility of the unions in the risk of layoffs and closures at Pomigliano and Mirafiori?

TP: What is happening in Pomigliano is shocking. When we used to have workers’ assemblies in Pomigliano, I would make sure that we urged our coworkers to be critical of the unions. Workers revolted against the bureaucracy. We would not allow them to force us to work in such conditions.

Until the early 90s, we had an automatic mechanism that allowed us to make up for lost inflation, the *Scala Mobile*. Wages were adjusted to the cost of living. The Craxi government, in complicity with CGIL, CISL and UIL unions, eliminated it. In 1992-93, they introduced the “concertation,” through which the union gave up being a fighting organization to becoming an organization that sits at

the table and discusses without any conflict: so, collaborationist.

Through the new system, at the end of the year they would give you a new count of inflation, which in the end would not even allow you to recover against inflation. Over the years it led us to a crazy decrease in wages, and this was caused by whom? By the labor organizations, by CGL, CISL and UIL.

Workers would get pissed off at the unions, because they would say to them, how can you come here and tell us that there is a need for wage recovery, when you then are the real culprit in this? Their role led to changes in the law that emasculated our efforts. [Today’s union leaders] are placed there like Italian politicians, simply to play their complicit role, their game.

WSWS: About deaths on the job, who’s responsible there?

TP: Regarding the issue of workplace accidents, there is no real intention to change the situation, either on the part of the government or the trade unions, in that they are complicit. In case of failure of safety or simply illegitimate operations, there is complicity on their part because union representatives are inside the workplaces, like in Pomigliano at Stellantis. They simply turn the other way. Then, they shouldn’t come inside our workplaces or through the media beating their chests. They are the primary perpetrators of at least moral responsibility for the injuries and deaths of our brothers and sisters.

WSWS: What would you like to tell your brothers and sisters in the US who are planning protests, independently of the union bureaucracy, to fight the mass firings of temp workers and the layoffs?

TP: On the struggle of American autoworkers, as an autoworker myself I am in full solidarity with all the workers who are seriously fighting for their emancipation and in defense of their jobs and wages.

Only through the unity of all workers’ forces can a real fighting movement be created capable of countering the methods that companies use to exploit the proletariat and the working masses. Only in this way can we really put a stop to the ongoing devastation, because if we simply limit ourselves to watching it happen, we become the culprits of the social collapse of our economy, both national and international. You have our full availability and support.



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