

Ford extends Oakville, Ontario assembly plant EV retooling layoffs into 2027

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Are you an autoworker at Ford Oakville? Contact us by filling out the form below to let us know what you think about the extended retooling and layoffs. All comments will be kept anonymous.

Ford announced on Thursday that it will delay the resumption of production at its Oakville, Ontario, assembly plant after planned retooling for electric vehicle (EV) production from 2025 until 2027, adding two years to an expected six-to-eight-month shutdown and layoff for thousands of workers in the Greater Toronto Area.

Current production of the traditional gas-powered Ford Edge at the plant will end in early May. While some will remain to work on the transition, which is still set to commence this year, much of the plant's 3,200 workers, members of Unifor, will be laid off for up to three years. This is well beyond the originally announced timeline and the end of the current contract, which expires in 2026.

An April 4 letter from plant management justified the delay by citing the fact that the market for EVs continues to “evolve and shift;” that the falling cost of EVs has “put significant pressure on EV profitability;” and that the “retiming” will allow for reducing the cost of materials and the adoption of more efficient battery technology.

The transition to EV production by the auto companies is being used to carry out far reaching attacks on workers' jobs and living standards in pursuit of ever greater profits. It is expected that hundreds of thousands of jobs across the current global production and supply chain will be destroyed by auto companies, with fewer labour hours and parts needed to produce each vehicle. Their aim is to use EV production as an opportunity to boost shareholder profits at the expense of autoworkers, who face real wage cuts and job

insecurity.

This process has already been co-signed by Unifor, which is among the most eager boosters of the EV transition. Canada's largest private-sector union, Unifor is a key pillar of support for the pro-war, pro-austerity Liberal government, and has pushed provincial and federal governments to provide the corporate giants with billions of dollars in subsidies to entice them to retool their facilities and build new battery plants. In 2020, the Liberal federal government and Conservative Ontario provincial government agree to provide Ford with CAD\$590 million in subsidies to retool Oakville for EV production.

Unifor President Lana Payne had been informed of the extended layoff in a meeting on Tuesday, April 2 with Ford CEO Jim Farley and other executives at the company's headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan. She declared Thursday that she was “extremely disappointed” by the decision but that the union would work with the company to “lessen the impact” on workers and their families.

The sellout contract pushed through at Ford by the Unifor apparatus led by Payne last year over widespread worker opposition—including an outright rejection by Oakville production workers and skilled trades workers company wide—places no limits on the company's ability to extend the planned downtime for the Oakville plant. And there are no provisions to extend “income security” provisions if the company delayed retooling, apart from vague company promises to hold consultations with union officials.

After using anti-democratic maneuvers to get the contract passed, including violating the union's own ratification rules by declaring the contract approved despite the opposition of skilled trades, Payne and the Unifor bureaucracy arrogantly proclaimed “priorities

met, pattern set.” These priorities were clearly those of Ford management and their Unifor accomplices, not those of the rank-and-file.

Under the terms of the current contract, autoworkers on layoff will receive just 70 percent of their normal wages through Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB). The length of payouts is based on seniority, with those workers with 20 years’ experience getting payments for up to 2 years. Workers with one to three years on the job can expect SUB support for just 9 months. Laid off workers will face extreme uncertainty and financial stress as they wait for the plant to resume operations, forcing them to look for other work and rely on food banks to make ends meet.

The insecurity that is in store for workers at Oakville, during and even after the three-year shutdown, can be seen at the GM CAMI plant in Ingersoll, Ontario. The plant, which builds all-electric delivery vans, resumed operations this week after a six-month shutdown due to a battery shortage. During the switch over of the plant from traditional auto production to EVs, workers had to rely on food banks while trying to survive on reduced pay.

The extended delay in retooling at Oakville follows on the heels of the announcement of 1,400 layoffs at Ford’s flagship Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan. Half of the workers who had been assembling the Ford F150 Lightning truck, the company’s largest current EV, will eventually be reassigned to another plant, while 700 are being forced into early retirement.

The Ford layoffs, along with the firing of hundreds of supplemental employees by Stellantis, have further exposed the fraudulent nature of the UAW’s “stand-up strike” last year, along with President Shawn Fain’s militant posturing about “record contracts.” The UAW’s strike against the Detroit Three, which called out workers at a few plants across Ford, GM and Stellantis, never stopped production and barely dented corporate profits.

The latest moves by the Detroit Three in the US and Canada reveal the utter bankruptcy of Unifor and the UAW’s nationalist bargaining strategies. The automakers, operating on every continent, take their decisions on a global scale, depending on sales, access to raw materials, shifts in regulatory costs, and public subsidies. The union bureaucracies keep workers bound to a national framework, while they pit workers in one

country against another to offer the most “competitive” conditions for the auto giants. Despite the coincidence of the Detroit Three contract expirations last year, the UAW and Unifor worked together to keep the contract struggles separated by the US-Canada border, profoundly undermining workers’ power.

Ford’s latest announcement on Oakville underscores that the only ones who benefit from the unions’ nationalist bargaining strategies are the corporate executives, who have a free hand to adjust and reduce production as they see fit to boost profits, and the union bureaucrats, who cement their corporatist ties with management and governments. The defence of workers’ jobs and living standards during the EV transition necessitates a new strategy, the construction of rank-and-file committees to place power in the hands of workers on the shop floor. Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, these committees will coordinate the struggle for jobs and protections in the EV transition on a world scale regardless of international boundaries. Fill out the form below for more information on building a rank-and-file committee at your plant.



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