

Workers at UK Stellantis plants oppose US and global job losses

Our reporters
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A WSWS reporting team campaigned Friday at Vauxhall's auto plant in Luton, England to raise with workers the threat of job losses being carried out in the US and internationally by parent group Stellantis.

The Luton plant, which produces larger petrol and diesel vans, is one of two auto plants in Britain owned by Stellantis. The other is in Ellesmere Port in the north west of England which produces the Vauxhall Combo-e, Citroën e-Berlingo, Peugeot e-Partner and FIAT E-Doblò electric vans and their passenger car equivalents. At least £100 million was invested in the refurb of the Ellesmere Port plant.

Both UK plants are threatened with closure, as the global competition among Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturers intensifies.

In January 2021, Groupe PSA and Fiat Chrysler automobiles merged to form Stellantis. Employing a global workforce of hundreds of thousands across 30 countries, Stellantis owns many brands including Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Citroën, Dodge, Fiat, Jeep, Lancia, Maserati, Opel, Peugeot, and Vauxhall.

Both UK plants are undergoing their annual summer maintenance periods, with workers telling WSWS teams that they were unaware of threatened job losses in the United States where 2,450 workers are to be laid off at the beginning of October at the truck assembly plant in Warren, Michigan.

A more massive cull of jobs is being prepared at Stellantis' Italian operation, with the company announcing August 8 that up to 12,000 jobs could be lost in 2025. This will result in the loss of a further 13,000 jobs among workers at parts suppliers in Italy.

Workers at both UK plants blamed the trade union bureaucracy for keeping them in the dark about the job losses.

Stellantis is leveraging its position as a global corporation to demand additional subsidies, including

changes to sales tax policy from the UK Labour government led by Sir Keir Starmer—backed by threats to shift production elsewhere.

In April, Stellantis head Carlos Tavares stated that the then Conservative government's electric vehicle policy is "terrible", threatening to bankrupt carmakers. Tavares complained about the 2023 government zero emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate which stipulates that manufacturers meet EV sales targets that rise annually or be hit by fines. This is a requirement to meet a goal of 100 percent of new cars and vans sold in Britain being zero emission vehicles by 2035. By 2030, the target is 80 percent of new cars and 70 percent of new vans. Tavares stated that this was "double the natural demand of the market", adding, "To survive, companies have to stay in the black... I will not sell cars at a loss."

At the end of June, as profits at Stellantis dropped a massive 48 percent to €5.6 billion in the first half of the year, the company ramped up pressure on the incoming Labour government which took office just days later. In a *Financial Times* article, "Stellantis threatens to halt UK production over EV targets", Maria Grazia Davino, the company's top UK executive, said amid tough EV mandates amid slowing sales in battery-run cars, "If this market becomes hostile for us, then we will enter an evaluation of producing elsewhere."

This threatening regime, which demands ever increased levels of exploitation of the workforce, can only proceed because of the collusion of the union bureaucracy. As one worker at the Luton plant told the WSWS, "The union officers just sit around eating cream cakes and drinking tea and just let management do what they want."

Unite union national officer Des Quinn said before Labour came to office that an incoming government had to relax the ZEV [zero emission vehicle] mandate for those car companies investing in Britain. "There's got to be a balance... I would give a bit to take something back in

terms of automotive sector and industrial strategy.”

The union’s response to the impending job losses is to call for ever closer collaboration with the company in Britain in order that job losses take place elsewhere. It is in their role as industrial enforcers for the corporation that their lucrative positions as adjuncts of management is maintained.

On the announcement of EV production at Ellesmere Port in 2021, then Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey boasted, “Unite has battled for years to secure the future of this site. Our members have been unfailing in their efforts, and I have lobbied Stellantis’s CEO Carlos Tavares and the top levels of government personally on numerous occasions.”

Now its profits are threatened amid the cut-throat EV market, Stellantis—just three years later—is threatening its entire UK workforce with plant closures unless its demands are met. Unite will again be called on to enforce even harsher working conditions carried out by a reduced workforce

Auto workers in Britain must reject the nationalist pro-capitalist agenda of the union bureaucracy which can only lead to job losses, and even the total closures of Luton and Ellesmere Port.

Jobs are being lost in the thousand throughout the auto industry in Europe. Last month Volkswagen announced plans threatening 3,000 jobs as it discontinues production of the Audi Q8 e-tron electric SUV, and prepares to shut down its Audi plant in Brussels. Up to 1,500 of these jobs could be gone by October.

The *Financial Times* noted that this “would mark the German carmaker’s first-ever plant closure in Europe. Ford’s Saarlouis plant in Germany is also on the way out, and the UK is, of course, no stranger to car companies ceasing production.” It concluded, “Closing plants, while painful, may be a signal that the sector is instead grappling with the harsh realities of its predicament.”

Workers at Stellantis, Volkswagen, Ford and other carmakers must establish independent action committees operating independently of the unions, in preparation for a joint struggle in defence of their jobs and working conditions. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is coordinating this work internationally.

Hundreds of workers took leaflets at the factory gates at Vauxhall, Luton. The common response of workers to the statement by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File

Committees: “Stop mass layoffs at Warren Truck! Mobilise the International working class against job cuts !” was “Thanks for letting us know,” “We did not know about this” and “The union have not told us about this.”

One assembly line worker said the union had not told them of the Detroit plant closure, you’re the first ones to tell us about it. He held up his fist and added, “I support a fight, solidarity with Detroit!”

Another told the campaign team, “Stellantis will not be happy you being here. It is a nasty atmosphere in there. The union officers just sit around eating cream cakes and drinking tea and just let management do what they want. It’s not just me, everyone in there will tell you the same thing.”

Workers were aware of the threat to their plant’s future. One said, “We know this plant is threatened. Stellantis is demanding government money to stay. If they don’t get it, then they will shut it down and move on, It’s how these companies operate.

“A new senior manager has appeared recently. He doesn’t talk to anyone. It’s been seen before. It resulted in the closure of a large part of the factory.” Pointing to new houses and flats he added, “They sold the land to build those new luxury flats and houses you can see.”

Another worker recounted the experience of the closure of the Peugeot plant in Coventry, West Midlands, where he had friends. “Trimmers were the last to go. Can you imagine, as each part of the factory closed, it was knocked down and you’re watching this. It is what they are doing here.”

A worker described his dismay at the impact of incentive schemes, which created an atmosphere of distrust and competition between different plants in Vauxhall, between Luton and Ellesmere Port. “I’m not sure about the programme you are advocating. I will have to look more into it. I’ll go to your website, but what I do know is what has not or does not work is setting workers in plants in one country or country against country. That does not work. Factories just close.”

Another said of the role of the union at the plant, “Some union convenors pay has been raised to the level of management. They are not going to challenge anything. They are going to look after their income first.”



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