

Defeat Unite's collusion with Stellantis and Labour government! Organise rank-and-file action to defend jobs!

Tony Robson
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Are you a Vauxhall-Stellantis worker at Luton or Ellesmere Port? Do you have information about conditions at your workplace? If so, get in touch using the form below. All submissions are anonymised.

Vauxhall workers can place no confidence in Unite the union's belated pledge of "full backing" for car workers opposing Stellantis's threatened closure of the Luton and Ellesmere Port plants.

For more than a month after Stellantis chief executive Carlos Tavares's highly publicised closure threat against 2,500 Vauxhall workers, Unite was silent. Its stonewalling continued for weeks, even after the company announced plant meetings for November 26 which workers feared would confirm plans for closure and/or mass layoffs.

Widespread anger by Vauxhall workers—as reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*—is the real reason Unite ended radio silence. But Unite's statement on November 17 is aimed at preventing a fightback, not launching one.

Its press release, described by Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham as a "warning shot" against Stellantis over the plants' future, commits the official leadership to nothing. It puts forward no concrete proposals to fight the shuttering of the plants or further job losses.

No mass meetings have been called for Vauxhall workers to raise their grievances and draw up non-negotiable strike demands against the threatened closure and appealing to Stellantis workers worldwide. This is what a real fight would entail, not a PR exercise conducted through the media.

Unite's overriding strategy is corporatism: an alliance of the union bureaucracy with company boardrooms and the Labour government to make British car manufacturing "internationally competitive". This economic nationalist programme has led to the virtual destruction of the car industry and a never-ending race to the bottom.

Graham states: "Unite is already having constructive discussions with the government and industry to reform the ZEV [zero emission vehicle] mandate to protect jobs. Much

more can be done, but the transition to electrification will not be achieved by threatening workers". Unite's "constructive discussions" are a conspiracy against car workers "in the national interest".

Global strategy is needed

Stellantis is not simply "threatening" workers. It is implementing a global jobs massacre. In Italy, the company has earmarked 12,000 jobs for destruction next year, provoking the first national strike by Italian autoworkers in two decades; in the US, Stellantis announced 1,139 indefinite layoffs at the Toledo Assembly Complex in Ohio (where Gladiator and Wrangler jeeps are made), following 2,400 layoffs at Detroit Warren Truck Assembly Plant in Michigan. This is only the beginning.

Stellantis's ultimatum to the Labour government that it will pull production from the UK unless concessions are granted is part of a globally coordinated strategy. Automakers are seizing on the shift to electric vehicles to restructure the industry and launch a frontal assault on the jobs, conditions and wages of car workers.

As far as the automakers are concerned, the cost of EV retooling must be borne by workers, through lower labour costs, throwing thousands onto the scrapheap, while protecting the profits of billionaire shareholders. Moreover, the struggle for market dominance is driving trade war and protectionism. US and European car producers are competing against China over who will dominate the EV market, part of a cut-throat struggle leading to world war.

Unite avoids any reference to this brutal reality of capitalist production and its implications for the class struggle, portraying Stellantis's actions as "mismanagement" by Tavares. This is absurd. Volkswagen

has announced plans to close three of its plants in Germany and is demanding pay cuts of 20 percent pay alongside the closure of its Audi plant in Belgium. Nissan has announced 9,000 job cuts, to cite just a few examples.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has called for a globally coordinated fightback by autoworkers, insisting that: “The campaign against layoffs must be on a world scale because every industry operates using globalized production and supply chains. There is no such thing anymore as a ‘German’ or ‘American’ car. Instead, modern vehicles are a product of the coordinated labour of workers in dozens of countries, regardless of whether the corporate headquarters are in Wolfsburg or Detroit”.

Vauxhall workers know they are fighting a global corporation, and WSWs reporters at Luton and Ellesmere Port have encountered widespread support for a fightback with Stellantis workers in Europe and the US, including strikes that could paralyse Stellantis overnight. But while Unite’s press statement name-checks strikes by Stellantis workers in Italy and balloting for action in United States, the union bureaucracy is hostile to any fight which challenges their long-established partnership with the company.

United and effective action by Stellantis workers worldwide can only be achieved by the rank-and-file in direct opposition to the economic nationalism and corporatism of the trade union bureaucracy. Whether Unite in Britain or the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the US, the trade unions today are led by pro-company stooges whose salaries and expense accounts place them in the top 1 to 5 percent of income earners.

Graham’s pledge that Vauxhall workers will receive “the unequivocal backing and the whole weight of the union behind them” to fight Stellantis’s closure must be judged against Unite’s actions over decades.

Unite has worked with successive owners—General Motors, PSA Group and Stellantis—to eliminate thousands of jobs at Vauxhall, destroying hard-won conditions and suppressing wages. Vauxhall’s current reliance on van-only production and the switch to EV was hailed in July 2021 by Unite’s then-general secretary Len McCluskey as securing a “bright future”. This followed the stripping out of car production from Vauxhall’s operations at the expense of thousands of jobs.

Repeated closure threats were used to wring concessions from Vauxhall workers. In 2001, the TGWU (predecessor of Unite) published *The Case for Britain*, urging GM to reverse its closure announcement because British workers were cheaper than car workers on the continent, and accusing GM of “betraying the productivity agreements made with the union”. This included a three-year deal that delivered

“flexibility and productivity improvements” and a wage deal “to help cut costs”.

Unite’s bankrupt strategy of sweetheart deals with the auto companies to defend threatened plants against closure was exposed once again with the closure of the Honda plant in Swindon in 2021 with the loss of 3,500 jobs, after Unite had earlier agreed to pay cuts and voluntary redundancies.

Vauxhall workers should not wait on events. It is critical to seize the initiative and establish rank-and-file committees at Luton and Ellesmere Port, to map out an industrial and political strategy and to reach out to Stellantis workers worldwide.

The IWA-RFC proposes as a starting point the following demands:

- Reject the race to the bottom! No sacrifice of jobs, pay or conditions to maintain production in the UK. Unite car workers worldwide!

- No two-tier workforce! All temporary workers must be provided a permanent contract on equal pay, terms and conditions.

- EV technology for workers not billionaire shareholders! The reduced labour time expended on EVs must be used to shorten the working day and to increase pay, compensating for decades of declining wages.

- Place Vauxhall-Stellantis under public ownership! The auto companies must be nationalised under workers’ democratic control. Profits must be used to provide secure and well-paid employment, research and development.

- Vehicle design and production determined by car workers and scientists not hedge fund managers and bankers. Production for social need not private profit!

We urge Vauxhall workers who agree with this to get in touch.



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