

Stellantis workers speak on threatened plant closures in the UK: “This is an international problem and therefore the struggle itself is global”

Our reporters
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On Friday, workers at the Stellantis-owned Vauxhall van plant in Luton spoke with a reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) leafletting with the article, “Defeat Unite’s collusion with Stellantis and Labour government! Organise rank-and-file action to defend jobs!”

Both the Luton plant 30 miles north of London and the other Stellantis plant in Ellesmere Port, north-west England producing electric vans have a closure threat hanging over them, directly threatening 2,500 jobs.

Stellantis’s chief executive Carlos Tavares renewed the threat on October 14. Vauxhall workers have been kept on tenterhooks, with the company holding onsite meetings this coming Tuesday where a decision is due to be announced.

The Unite union was silent for over a month before General Secretary Sharon Graham issued a pro-forma statement November 17. She said that the union was working with the Labour government over the concessions demanded by Stellantis and other transnationals, including Ford and Nissan, to the UK quota of production of electric vehicles.

The confirmation of Unite’s corporatist agenda to work with Stellantis followed widespread opposition expressed by Vauxhall workers at Luton reported by the WSWS against the silence maintained by their union. This has only been broken by Unite to pre-empt calls for action and pit workers at both sites against their class brothers and sisters facing the same jobs massacre in the US and Europe.

Over 200 leaflets were taken up by workers on the shift change at the Luton plant, who responded with

enthusiasm to the call from the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which explains:

“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.”

After previous campaigns at the plant with IWA-RFC statements, Luton workers said the articles were being accessed online and shared among coworkers. They discussed the programme of demands to fight for workers’ independent interests against the profit drive of the competing auto transnationals.

Several workers had already written in to the WSWS expressing an interest in the IWA-RFC and stating they had no confidence in the Unite union. One worker said the articles and statements have been widely read and “praised by everyone” and “we are all talking about them.”

Handfuls of leaflets were taken by workers to make sure it was widely distributed to their coworkers in the plant. One described the atmosphere inside the factory as “ready for a fight” and widespread anger at Unite over its extended silence over threatened plants and jobs.

The WSWS article makes the critical point that the most divisive intervention is by Unite General Secretary Graham in fostering economic nationalism,

setting workers against each other. It states: “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.”

An assembly line worker asked about the threatened closure of the plant said, “That Carlos Tavares is a greedy bastard. I don’t even know if I’ll have a job by Christmas. It’s an awful situation for everyone working here to face. These people have no heart.”

Another assembly line worker responding to the call for a unified international struggle of car workers said, “I know Stellantis are having this big meeting soon in Paris. I think a lot of our livelihoods are going to be on the line. I agree that this is an international problem and therefore the struggle itself is global.”

One experienced worker described conditions within the plant: “It’s a horrible place to work. Unite is terrible. Not only have they been useless, but it feels like they’re in bed with the company. They’ve done hardly anything about these planned closures and they’ve basically kept us in the dark. The communication between workers, management and the union is basically non-existent.”

Another pointed out a health and safety representative, who stood speaking to another member of the WSWs reporting team, and who promoted Unite’s credentials as a pro-worker and internationalist trade union.

“The air quality is terrible inside because we constantly have the engines running. Sometimes there are clouds of black smoke everywhere [the Luton plant still produces petrol and diesel vans, switching to EV from the start of 2025 alongside production of ICE vans]. It’s freezing inside the factory but we’re not allowed heaters because we’ve been told they cost too much to run, though there are about four heaters in the union office. Honestly, the union and health and safety reps have done nothing.”

A section of workers were not even aware of the plant meetings on November 26 and thanked WSWs reporters for informing them. “I didn’t even know this was happening. That’s how little Unite tells us. It’s like they don’t even exist sometimes.”

Once again on the role of Unite, another assembly worker said, “Thank you for mentioning Unite’s role in this mess. It’s good to know there are some people who are actually talking about this.”

One worker who had signed up for the IWA-RFC expressed his agreement with the demands of the statement, especially the mistreatment of agency workers who he said get fired over the slightest issue. He was scathing on the cosy relations between Unite and the company.

Another said of the call for the international unity of car workers to defeat the onslaught on jobs. “it would be very important if we could establish that.”

Another summed up decades of sell-outs by Unite, and its forerunner the Transport and General Workers Union: “Rubbish, they have sold us out for years.”

In further discussions workers raised that a rank-and-file organization would need to stand up against the combined pressure of the union and management. This underlines the fact that Vauxhall workers must turn to a force that is more powerful than the bureaucratic pro-company apparatus by opening lines of communication between both UK plants and Stellantis workers globally to leverage their strength by developing a joint strategy.

The WSWs statement makes the following critical point:

“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.”



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