

Vauxhall workers in England oppose closure of Luton plant by Stellantis and support international fightback

Our reporters
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Vauxhall workers at both UK plants in Luton and Ellesmere Port spoke out against mass job destruction by parent company Stellantis. *World Socialist Web Site* reporting teams leafleted both sites this week with the article, “Oppose Vauxhall Luton plant closure! Defeat Unite’s alliance with Stellantis and the Labour government! For a global fightback!”

Stellantis announced last Wednesday the closure of the Luton van plant, directly axing at least 1,100 jobs, with production ending in the second quarter of 2025 and all manufacturing transferred to its electric vehicle-only site in Ellesmere Port from 2026.

The WSWS article states, “This brutal restructuring agenda must be met with a combined fight by Vauxhall workers at both plants, and a coordinated strategy to unite with Stellantis workers in Europe and the US against the global jobs massacre being conducted by the company.”

At Luton on Wednesday, around 220 workers on the morning/afternoon shift changeover took copies of the leaflet, with several stopping to talk and sign up for the newsletter of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Workers said they were thrown to the wolves by the Unite union on November 26, the day they were called before management and informed of the plan to close the factory and told to go home to “process” the “surprise” news.

“Unite officials were nowhere to be seen, put that on your web site,” said one.

Another described it as a pre-planned operation to prevent a struggle breaking out. There was no mass meeting called by Unite that day. This meant that those on night shift found out about the company’s intention to throw them on the scrapheap via social media.

Unite has hailed the £50 million investment in

Ellesmere Port while stating that the closure of Luton is “not acceptable,” when it is clearly part of the same downsizing and cost-cutting operation to ramp up exploitation from a drastically reduced workforce.

Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham said nothing for a month about the threat to both plants. It was only on November 17 that Unite issued a press release stating a deal could be struck based on the union’s participation in talks with the Labour government on the concessions demanded by Stellantis over the UK mandate on ZEV (zero emissions vehicles).

The “warning shot” of collective action if the company threatened either plant never materialised. Unite has been the chief enabler of Stellantis, playing Luton and Ellesmere Port workers off against one another, just as it pits British workers against their co-workers internationally, tying Vauxhall workers to Stellantis by championing competitiveness and corporate viability.

A worker said they were “devastated” and had “nowhere to go to get another job. I don’t know what to do.” Another said, “It’s not just the people who work here. It’s their families too. We’ve been placed in an awful situation.” A colleague said they were facing “an exercise in asset stripping, Stellantis don’t give a shit about the workers.”

An agency worker at the factory for nine years said losing his job meant “no real redundancy pay because I’m not on a full-time contract.” Most workers are on temporary and casual contracts, he said.

The planned closure of the Luton plant is expected to lead to the loss of up to 3,700 jobs in the regional supply chain. It follows the announcement in October of the closure of ball bearing factory SFK in the town, with the loss of 300 jobs.

The WSWS has urged workers to form rank-and-file

committees to take the fight against the factory closure out of the hands of the Unite bureaucracy.

A WSWS article on August 25 stated, “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”.

A Unite banner attached to the factory gate, “Save Vauxhall Jobs. We’re Backing Luton,” appeared days after the announced closure. It was seen as a sick joke by most workers. “The union are doing nothing for us,” said one. Another was “not surprised with the lack of information coming from the union, they never told us anything about the closure of the plant.”

Unite has been embedded with the plans of Stellantis, as shown by the fact that the day after the company announced the planned closure of Luton it launched a “Collective Consultation” with “its trade union partners”. This included a “commitment” to “support employees in choosing the right option for them,” e.g., implementing the company’s demands for transfer, redundancy and retraining.

In a December 5 column in *Luton Today*, local Labour MP Rachel Hopkins described the “fight” she was putting up as talking with Labour ministers in different departments of the Starmer government. Labour’s Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds stated in parliament just after the announcement that “the government had already done everything it could to prevent the closure.”

Workers signing up to the IWA-RFC newsletter and for further discussion on establishing a rank-and-file committee at Vauxhall were aware that Stellantis was closing plants in other countries and thought it necessary to organise with workers internationally facing the same attacks. One sign-up said they were very supportive of an international approach and a fight for socialism. An agency worker said he had been reading the articles on the WSWS and agreed with the core principle of the IWA-RFC: “Uniting workers in the car industry internationally will give us the collective power to fight these multinationals.”

Workers at the Vauxhall plant in Ellesmere Port were no less critical of Unite when the WSWS reporting team leafleted Thursday as workers came out in the afternoon. Despite pouring rain and the attention of company security guards, around 150 leaflets were taken up as workers exited the site, mainly by car.

Stellantis is also cutting jobs at Ellesmere Port. One worker said he was being laid off; “Stellantis want more people on agency. I can’t remember when they last gave out permanent contracts. It’s so they can let you go.”

Other comments included: “I’ve worked at Luton. There should be solidarity action with the Luton workers. If they get rid of them at Luton, we’ll be next”; “The union here haven’t even had a meeting about it”; “The union aren’t doing anything, they’re in with management”; “the union’s in the company’s pocket”.

Stellantis confirmed December 4 that its closure plan for Luton would not be changed by the early resignation of chief executive Carlos Tavares announced last Sunday. “There are no changes to the proposals made despite the resignation of the CEO. We are actively engaged with all interested parties in this consultation period.” But Unite like its bureaucratic counterparts the UAW in America is seeking to use the enforced departure of Tavares to promise a new dawn for workers, all aimed at facilitating deepened collusion with Stellantis. Graham stated in a Unite press release December 5 that this was an opportunity to “turn the page on years of anti-worker strategies.”

This was to announce a meeting the next day between union stewards and management at the Luton plant “to discuss counterproposals to site closure.” The press release states that the plant is “highly profitable” and had met “every manufacturing cost target asked of them by Tavares,” before claiming this was without “impacting jobs, pay and conditions.”

We urge Vauxhall workers to seize the initiative and take up the fight to establish rank-and-file committees at Luton and Ellesmere Port to map out an industrial and political strategy and reach out to Stellantis workers worldwide.



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