

Car workers in Luton respond to Stellantis UK plant closure: “Workers united internationally have the power to fight these companies”

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During a shift change at Stellantis’s Vauxhall van plant in Luton, which is scheduled to begin closing at the end of March, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters distributed hundreds of copies of a recent statement: “Stellantis Luton closure confirmed with 1,200 job losses: Workers must adopt a new strategy.”

Stellantis’s closure in Luton, England, brings an end to 120 years of vehicle production in the city, and is part of a new stage in the global war against car workers’ jobs. The WSWs statement distributed at Vauxhall’s factory gates urged the formation of rank-and-file committees at Luton and at the company’s Ellesmere Port plant, warning that no faith can be placed in Unite the union or the Labour government to oppose the closure.

Workers slammed Unite’s refusal to organize a collective fight against the closure, and expressed anger over the Starmer government’s refusal to defend hundreds of jobs. A Unite banner draped over the factory gate just days after the closure announcement last November read: “WE’RE BACKING LUTON”. It had been removed shortly before the company hosted meetings laying out proposed severance packages.

Many workers expressed shock and disbelief that the closure was going ahead, citing its devastating impact on Luton, including a further 5,000 jobs that will be destroyed in regional supply industries.

Luton is one of the poorest cities in Britain, with a child poverty rate of 46 percent. A furious worker told WSWs reporters, “I’m for a fight, but the unions are not. They have fought for us in the past, but not this time. They just let the factory close.”

He said the Labour government had agreed to the closure, “They were only interested in keeping at least one electric van producing factory open, so were the council, [while] pretending to be our friends. I’ll give Ellesmere Port a few years maximum--of course Stellantis are going to close it.”

Another worker said, “I told your reporters last time that it’s not just going to be Luton shutdown, Ellesmere port will be shut down because the government are not giving Stellantis concessions they want, so they will just move on like they are doing all over the world.”

Another worker said, “I have read these [leaflets]. I want a fight. The Labour council said they wanted to be on our side, yet they are now discussing with Stellantis to purchase the land when the plant shuts. They are f... liars. What is there [left] here? It’s the last major factory in Luton.”

A group of workers who stopped to talk said that Unite “have done nothing. If the union had told us what exactly was going on and started a fight, I’m all for it; I’d be the first in line to fight for our jobs.” His colleague added, “It’s the workers united together internationally have the power to fight these companies. The union didn’t tell us any of this and this is where we are now.”

Another Luton worker described his own experience with union officials: “You knock on the door, and they are not in. There’s no response. They are not telling us anything. Nobody’s telling what’s going, except [that] they are going through a ‘procedure’. Honestly, I cannot tell you anything, I just don’t know.”

One worker predicted how Vauxhall’s land will be

used for profiteering. He pointed to luxury flats built where the car plant was located prior to its closure in 2002, “Look around the corner, prime real estate 30 minutes from London. This will be developed with massive profits for Stellantis. I’ll read your leaflet.”

Another worker summed up his 25 years’ experience with car companies and Unite the union: “The car factory has gone, the van factory gone, car parts factory has gone, they have all gone. What has the union done? Allowed them all to close.”

A veteran production line worker told reporters, “I’m devastated about the closure. Luton is already deprived. My grandfather worked in this plant. It has a rich history of car and van building. I don’t know what I’m going to do to find work.”

Many workers spoke of an uncertain future, “I returned to work on a temporary contract. I took the job as I was desperate for work to pay my bills. And now they are closing the factory. I don’t know where to go.”

Reporters explained that Stellantis in America had just slashed its profit-sharing bonuses to workers by 70 percent, and warned that no agreements by the company can be trusted, including on proposed redundancy packages.

Workers discussed their own experience with profit-sharing in Britain, “I’m devastated. We got a miserly £132 on the profit-sharing bonus and I’ve got to pay tax on it, while Stellantis earned £5 billion in profits.” Another said, “Guess what? We got £132, and they are shutting the plant.” His colleague added, “They’ve made 5 billion in profit. Our share? 132 pounds.”

“It’s really stressful at the minute,” another Luton worker told WSWS reporters, “All Carlos Tavaréz [former Stellantis CEO] has done is take the money and stuffed the workers.”

Productivity deals agreed between Unite and Stellantis, packaged as the only way to stop closure, were also angrily attacked by workers: “They promised me ‘yeah you will be alright’. Now I’m going to have to look for another job. I’m only young. There are no jobs round here, the area is deprived. They made us push hard, and promised [us] all is OK, the plant will stay open if we hit the targets. All they have done is take the money and run. Stellantis is just greedy. GM [General Motors, the former owner of Vauxhall] should have stayed.”

WSWS reporters said it was crucial that workers

adopt an international strategy, uniting car workers across Europe, North America and Asia. The auto companies are carrying out a coordinated jobs massacre worldwide, using AI to slash costs. In 2002, it was GM that closed car production at Luton, with the loss of 2,000 jobs.

Many workers asked how a fight could be conducted so late in the day. WSWS reporters urged a careful study of the strategy being advanced by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The IWA-RFC is building support among autoworkers in the US, Canada, Mexico and Germany. A fight by workers in Luton against the closure would be greeted enthusiastically by workers across the UK and worldwide who are facing the same problems.

Workers expressed interest in learning more about the IWA-RFC and subscribing to the WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter.

Workers at Luton and Ellesmere Port must take matters into their own hands. Already at Nissan Sunderland (in the north east of England), Unite has negotiated with company executives to shut-down the nightshift. With 6,000 workers, it is the UK’s largest car factory. Nissan wants to shut three factories in Europe to protect their profits. The jobs massacre will be massively escalated under conditions of a global tariff war driven by the anarchy of the capitalist nation-state system.

As the WSWS statement distributed at the factory gates explained: “Even at this late stage in the closure programme, rank-and-file workers can intervene and alter the course of events. They should establish their own committees at the Luton and Ellesmere plants and contact Stellantis’s workers internationally, as well as BMW, Nissan and Ford workers also facing plant closures and cuts to jobs and wages. Then they can begin to plan a counteroffensive.”



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