

GM Oshawa Assembly workers facing 700 layoffs amid ongoing Canada-US trade war

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8 May 2025

General Motors Canada announced last Friday that it will idle the third shift at its Oshawa, Ontario assembly plant this coming September. About 700 production workers will be laid off at that time. Another 1,500 supply chain jobs will also be affected.

While studiously omitting a more direct reference to the trade war initiated by US President Donald Trump, which he has repeatedly declared is aimed at collapsing Canada's economy and taking it over as the 51st state, the company nonetheless could not avoid attributing the cutback to "forecasted demand and the evolving trade environment."

As the Detroit Three auto companies respond to Trump's program to use punitive tariffs to "reshore" auto assembly and parts production back to the United States, a GM spokesperson explained, "These changes will help support a sustainable manufacturing footprint as GM reorients the Oshawa plant to build more trucks in Canada for Canadian customers."

GM has already briefly idled several Oshawa shifts, citing parts shortages that last month began to roil the supply chains in the North American auto industry. Trump's multiple tariff announcements have brought on "uncertainties" in short and long-term capital investment projections in auto production that has quickened the reshoring moves by the auto companies.

The GM announcement follows closely on the heels of its statement that 1,200 workers at its CAMI Ingersoll plant will be laid off at least until October to align its electric van production schedules "with current demand." When production does restart, only 700 workers will return to their jobs.

At the Stellantis Windsor, Ontario, assembly plant, more than 4,000 workers began another week-long pause in production on Monday. The downtime follows closely on from a two-week pause last month. On Tuesday, Stellantis revealed that the plant will rotate between periods of full production, reduced activity and full shutdown over the next 12 weeks.

The Stellantis shutdowns have already caused the

temporary layoff of 900 workers in two supporting transmission plants in Kokomo, Indiana, and at Warren and Sterling Heights stamping plants in Michigan, plus a month-long idling of its Toluca, Mexico, assembly operation.

The Oshawa assembly plant currently employs some 3,000 workers in three shifts. Chevrolet Silverado light and heavy duty trucks are the only vehicles assembled. Production of these pickups in Oshawa only began at the end of 2021 after the plant was initially shuttered in 2019. At that time, 98 percent of the workforce was either laid off or took early retirement. With Silverado sales spiking across the continent and absenteeism still high due to the pandemic, GM began to slowly re-open the Oshawa facility with over-run orders that could not be filled at its Fort Wayne, Indiana, facility.

With virtually all veteran employees consigned to the scrap heap and the Unifor-recommended contract with institutionalized two-tier wage and benefits systems already in place and nearly every worker hired in 2021 or later at vastly inferior compensation, management was further enticed to ramp up Silverado production.

But now GM management sees matters differently. General Motors CEO Mary Barra recently warned that the tariffs could cost the company up to \$5 billion. Shortly after Trump began his tariff announcements, GM began to hire additional low-wage temporary workers in Indiana to prepare for reshoring production of the percentage of Silverados that previously had been shipped from Oshawa to the American market.

In response to GM's Oshawa announcement, Unifor President Lana Payne has called on the newly elected government of Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney to deepen his "strategic tariff retaliation" response and increase penalties on companies relocating production to the United States. Carney, the former investment banker and Governor of the Banks of Canada and England, after offering his "sympathies" to the Oshawa workers facing layoff, noted that unless companies act in a true partnership, "there will be consequences." On Tuesday, Carney met Trump in Washington to pursue a trade deal that will safeguard

corporate interests on both sides of the border at the expense of the working class.

Payne and Carney are not opposed to trade wars in principle. They merely object to Trump's decision to impose tariffs on Canada. Both agree with the entire Canadian political establishment that Trump should focus on waging economic war on, and preparing for military conflict with China. They are eager for Ottawa to participate in a Trump-led "Fortress North America," so long as Canadian imperialism's prerogatives as Washington's junior partner are duly recognized.

For governments on both sides of the 49th parallel, the imposition of punishing tariffs on China are necessary, as are significant increases in military budgets to prepare for future armed confrontation with Beijing.

Payne's foul Canadian nationalism is a mirror image of United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain's American nationalism and pro-Trump propaganda. While Fain has applauded Trump, lyingly asserting that his tariffs on auto, steel and aluminium imports are helping "American workers," Payne and other leading Canadian union bureaucrats are urging workers to line up with the ruthless representatives of Canadian capital.

Both the UAW and Unifor have a decades-long record of pumping out reactionary nationalist programs that seek to pit autoworkers against each other in a race to the bottom in wages and working conditions. They are working with the auto bosses and, respectively the Canadian and American governments to off-load as many job losses as possible onto the backs of workers outside of their own national borders.

Fain promotes Trump's "Made in America" policies as the way forward to create a new "Arsenal of Democracy" for future shooting wars. With an eye towards China, he told reporters, "You know, people forget this lesson in World War II. The way that we formed the Arsenal of Democracy that won the war was, they took the excess capacity of all the automotive manufacturing plants in the country, and produced tanks and planes and bombs and engines and all those things."

Payne's position is equally as pro-war and nationalist. In a recent interview with *Toronto Life* magazine, she said that if she could speak with Trump, she "would appeal to our similarities. His job as president is to protect American workers. I get that. The US imports 3.5 million vehicles every year from companies [mostly in Europe and Asia] that have no footprint in their country, so perhaps they need to build assembly plants in the US. It's the same way in Canada. I would remind him that we have more in common than we don't."

Workers will be rather astonished to hear that, after Trump has conducted a 100-day rampage, slashing public sector

jobs and services, massively hiking military expenditures and viciously attacking what remains of democratic rights in the US, Payne "gets" that Trump's job "is to protect American workers." The fact of the matter is that Trump embodies the criminal financial oligarchy from which he draws his support, a section of society that is viciously hostile to the interests of the working class.

Workers, whether across North America or internationally, cannot defend their jobs and livelihoods amid an unfolding global trade war—one moreover that is part of a developing imperialist world war—by lining up with their "own" ruling class. But this is precisely what they are being told to do by the union bureaucracies and government officials, who have sought to outdo each other in nationalist slogan-mongering since the threat of tariffs was first raised.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its statement released ahead of the recent Canadian federal election:

The SEP fights for workers in every workplace to build rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the union apparatuses and controlled by workers themselves. Through such committees, workers can share information, counter the sabotage of the union bureaucrats, and link up their struggles across workplaces, industries and national borders so as to mobilize workers' immense social power.

The SEP supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which has been created as the means to unite workers around the world and coordinate their struggles in opposition to the poisonous nationalism of the trade union bureaucracy. With hundreds of thousands of jobs on the chopping block as the trade war intensifies, the IWA-RFC provides the means for workers in every country to defend all jobs, wages and working conditions.



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