

1,200 autoworkers in Canada lose their jobs as GM ends third shift at Oshawa Assembly Plant

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The midnight third shift at General Motors' Oshawa auto assembly plant was eliminated by the US-based automaker following the completion of the Friday, January 30 shift. The ensuing layoffs affect up to 1,200 workers throughout the auto supply chain in the industrial belt just east of Toronto. Some 500 direct GM jobs in the plant will be axed along with another 200 third-party workers who laboured side by side with the GM employed assembly workers. In addition, across the supply line, it is expected that about 500 more auto parts workers will lose their jobs. Almost all are members of Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union.

The layoffs in Oshawa are part of a jobs bloodbath sweeping North America, with major companies like Amazon, UPS, and Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, announcing the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs since the beginning of the year. This onslaught by the ruling class is fueling mounting opposition, as expressed in the mass protests in Minneapolis against Trump's drive to establish a dictatorship in the US, and major strikes by health care workers in New York and on the US west coast during the first month of 2026 alone. These developments underscore how autoworkers determined to defend their jobs against ruthless exploitation by the highly profitable automakers must link up their struggle with those of other workers in Canada and the US facing similar attacks.

In "re-balancing" operations at its Oshawa plant over the remaining two shifts, GM will apply seniority rules. A small number of higher-seniority members from the third shift will be bumped to the remaining shifts, while lower-seniority members across all three shifts will lose their jobs.

When this jobs massacre was first announced last spring, GM management, trying their best to soft-pedal Donald Trump's escalating tariff threats, announced that "forecasted demand and the evolving trade environment" were behind the impending job cuts. The announcement coincided with the company increasing production of a similar product at its Fort Wayne, Indiana facility. The Oshawa plant builds both light and heavy-duty Chevrolet Silverado pickup trucks.

The Oshawa layoffs came the same week GM reported more than \$12 billion in pre-tax earnings for 2025, along with plans to hike shareholder returns through dividend increases and a \$6 billion stock buyback scheme. This latest cash grab has only served to further stoke the anger of autoworkers now facing unemployment and, for those that remain inside the plants, increased exploitation.

The Oshawa assembly facility employed about 3,000 workers in three shifts before last week's cuts. Chevrolet Silverado light and heavy-duty trucks are the only vehicles assembled. Production of

these pickups in Oshawa began at the end of 2021 after the plant was initially shuttered in 2019. At that time, 98 percent of the workforce was either permanently laid off or took early retirement.

But with Silverado sales spiking across the continent and absenteeism still high due to the COVID-19 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 almost all of the veteran GM workforce in Oshawa now "off the books" due to the 2019 closure, the company saw the opportunity to boost profits from a largely newly-hired workforce. These workers invariably came into the plant at the lowest possible pay and benefits levels mandated under the miserable multi-tier compensation system agreed to by Unifor and its predecessor, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), in a succession of concessions contracts rammed through beginning in 2009.

After the 2019 shutdown, Unifor officials, unabashedly acting like a labour contractor, had boasted about the profit opportunities now available from a new, low-wage workforce to entice the company back to the mothballed Oshawa plant.

Standing squarely alongside Ontario Tory Premier Doug Ford, Unifor officials have responded to the elimination of the third-shift at Oshawa GM plant with a predictable call for stepped up trade war measures against the US. Ford has denounced Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney's deal with China to slash tariffs on a limited annual consignment of Electric Vehicle imports in exchange for Beijing rolling back its tariffs on canola and other Canadian foodstuffs. For Unifor, Doug Ford, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and the entire corporate-political establishment, tariffs are acceptable only when wielded on behalf of Canadian capital against workers in other countries.

Unifor President Lana Payne recently remarked, "We can't allow Trump to pit province against province, sector against sector and worker against worker. We need to stand together and hold the company accountable." This is balderdash! For generations, the union's entire approach to its relations with the auto bosses has been an unabashed nationalism, pitting Canadian auto workers against their counterparts in the US and Mexico in a fratricidal struggle for product placements and jobs. This nationalist policy, enshrined under the 1985 split of the continent-wide United Auto Workers (UAW) into competing Canadian and American contingents, remains the poisonous centerpiece of the auto unions on both sides of the border.

Moreover, it is rich for Payne to lecture about the need to oppose "division," when it is precisely her union that has taken the lead in

stoking foul “Team Canada” nationalism to incite Canadian workers against their American counterparts since Trump launched his global trade war last year. Aiming to weaken Canada’s economy, so it better serves Washington and Wall Street and ultimately can be annexed as America’s 51st state, Trump has particularly targeted auto, steel and aluminum, subjecting them to high tariffs.

In response, Unifor has championed an alliance with former central banker Mark Carney and Ontario Tory premier Doug Ford. It has continued to champion the alliance as the Carney government, under cover of “fighting Trump,” has ripped page after page from the policy books of both Trump and far-right federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre. The Carney government has imposed vicious austerity, massively expanded the military budget, expanded Ottawa’s drive to virtually abolish the right to strike, and ordered a “restructuring” of Canada Post under which 30,000 jobs are to be eliminated by 2035.

The nationalist beggar-thy-neighbour approach from the trade-warrior union bureaucrats on both sides of the border was succinctly put by both UAW and Unifor officials as the end of GM Oshawa’s third shift drew closer.

UAW Fort Wayne, Indiana plant bargaining chairman Rich LeTourneau, speaking like a company stooge, nakedly stated, “When the company comes to me to increase volume, I’m not gonna tell them ‘no,’ because it’s job security for my people, and hell, if I can corner the market, I will.” In response to LeTourneau’s statement, Jeff Gray, president of Unifor local 222 in Oshawa, saw it the same way. Whipsawing jobs is simply a shrewd business decision. “What if we had the opportunity in Canada to increase our volume or get different investments? Of course, we would be after that,” Gray said. Neither official cared to mention the years of wage cuts, speed-up and layoffs that have battered workers at both plants over the years as a direct result of the unions’ reactionary bidding war to “secure” investments and product placements.

Gray later took matters a step further. He challenged the Liberal government’s failure to act aggressively with retaliatory trade war measures, whose burden will fall first and foremost on American workers, and called into question his own national union leadership’s longtime support of Liberal and New Democratic Party politicians.

Further illuminating the ever-rightward path of the nationalist trade unions, Gray hosted Conservative leader Poilievre at a meeting so that the union officials could “share their concerns.” “Right now, with the Conservatives being the opposition,” said Gray, “they’ll take the opportunity to listen to us and put pressure on the government. We had high hopes for Prime Minister Carney when he was elected. We thought, ‘Oh, he’s going to get us this trade deal’.”

Similarly, for the first time ever, a major Unifor/CAW local endorsed the Tories in last year’s Ontario provincial election, throwing its supports behind the re-election of the hard-right, anti-worker Ford government. The move by Unifor’s Brampton-based Local 1285 came in the midst of an ever-lengthening shutdown of the Stellantis plant in that city. Some 3,200 workers there have been on layoff since 2024, supposedly for a re-tooling for electric car production. However, last year Stellantis announced that a projected re-start in 2026 was now indefinitely “paused” with no new model assigned to the plant.

The fallout extends well beyond Brampton and Oshawa. General Motors recently declared an end to production at its CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, eliminating about 1,200 jobs. At GM’s Propulsion plant in St. Catherines, the workforce has been cut in half and now sits at 600 workers as the company has delayed a scheduled

EV refit until at least 2027. And at Ford Oakville, management announced last April that it will delay the resumption of production at its assembly plant until at least 2027 due to another fiasco around retooling for electric vehicle production. 4,000 Oakville workers remain on layoff. During the 2023 contract ratification process there, thousands of workers were told to expect only an 8-month shutdown. Even then, the contract only passed by a narrow 54 percent vote, with a majority rejection in Oakville and a rejection by skilled trades across Ford’s Canadian operations.

The foundation for defending all jobs and rehiring laid off autoworkers is the international unification of workers’ struggles across North America. Workers in Canada must repudiate the nationalist poison peddled by the union bureaucracy and mount a joint struggle with their American class brothers and sisters, many of whom are exploited by the same transnational corporations or are linked by supply chains across the border. This requires that power be placed in the hands of the workers themselves through a break with the nationalist, pro-capitalist union apparatuses and the staffs of high-paid bureaucrats who run them. The organizational means to accomplish this is the building of rank-and-file committees, as initiated and fought for by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Rejecting appeals from the ruling class and their lackeys in the union bureaucracy for “sacrifices” in the name of “national unity,” workers must advance through their rank-and-file committees a program of struggle to end the dominance of the financial oligarchy over their lives. This should include the defence of all jobs, the rehiring of all laid-off workers, massive wage increases to reverse the long-term onslaught on pay and conditions, and workers’ control over production so that social life can be organized to meet the needs of the vast majority of the population, not the profit lust of a tiny few.



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