

Unifor keeps Stellantis workers on the job, as contract expires and automaker permanently shuts Brampton assembly

Carl Bronski, Keith Jones
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Unifor has said contract negotiations at Stellantis Canada are at an “impasse.” Yet it has refused to call its more than 9,000 members at the Detroit Three automaker out on strike, although their contract expired Monday, September 21.

In the face of repeated company provocations, the union refuses to even set a strike deadline.

Last month, the Detroit Three automaker reneged on its repeated pledges that its Brampton, Ontario, assembly plant would reopen—eliminating in one fell swoop close to a quarter of its Canadian workforce and placing the jobs of thousands of auto parts workers in jeopardy.

Then on September 11, as negotiations with Unifor were in high-gear, the company announced it had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Canadian-based arms manufacturer Roshel to buy the Brampton plant.

Last week, Stellantis Canada President Trevor Longley sent a letter to all 2,200 Brampton workers still on the Unifor membership rolls outlining the company’s intention to permanently close the plant, which was shuttered in 2024 as part of a promised model changeover to produce the next-generation Jeep Compass. Due to “unpredictable trade policies, challenging regulatory requirements and affordability pressures” Stellantis, Longley declared, does not see “a sustainable long-term business case that would support continued operations at the facility.”

Stellantis’ scrapping of the Brampton plant is part of a global reorganization of the auto industry. Automakers around the world are intensifying worker-exploitation in response to trade war; the climate change-driven transition to electric vehicles; the advent of artificial intelligence (AI); and a developing global war of which the NATO-instigated war with Russia over Ukraine and the US-Israeli war of aggression on Iran are two elements.

Working hand in glove with government, the transnational automakers are determined to use this reorganization to slash jobs, impose speed-up, and swell profits.

Stellantis’ announcement of the closure and sale of the Brampton assembly plant is intended to place maximum pressure on workers, with the aim of extracting further contract concessions from workers across its North American operations.

The response of the Unifor bureaucracy—like that of the UAW south of the border and the corporatist unions globally—is not to mobilize worker opposition, uniting workers across international borders in opposition to *all* layoffs, concessions and plant closures.

Rather it is to intensify their collaboration with the automakers and their “own” national governments in fighting for corporate market share, waging trade war and pursuing rearmament.

Thus Unifor is not mobilizing auto workers’ social power to oppose the

impending closure of Brampton Assembly, shutting down Stellantis operations and appealing for the support of workers at the company’s operations across the US and North America.

Unifor pleads to the big business Liberal government to save autoworkers’ jobs

Its appeals are instead directed to the big business Carney Liberal government and Stellantis, and they are based on touting the large profits the company has historically generated from the Brampton plant and more generally the profitability of the global automakers’ Canadian operations.

Unifor President Lana Payne is urging Industry Minister Mélanie Joly to pressure Stellantis to cancel the closure and sale of the Brampton plant, couching this as vital to ensuring Canada prevails in the reactionary Canada-US trade war. Payne, it should be noted, is a member of Carney’s tripartite, trade-war Advisory Council on Canada-US Economic Relations.

Determined to demonstrate that Unifor remains, to use its own words, an eager “partner” of the automakers and Canada’s big business governments, Payne stressed at a press conference last week that the union wants to keep Stellantis’ operations churning out profits. It has withdrawn from negotiations, but not set a strike deadline.

As part of this corporatist campaign, it is wrangling with the UAW over where the Jeep Compass should be assembled and urging the federal government to insist that Stellantis give back the huge subsidies it was provided, with Unifor’s full-throated support, unless it rescinds the closure decision.

Just as Unifor supports corporate Canada in the trade war, the UAW, under the leadership of Shawn Fain, has supported the tariffs imposed by the would-be fascist dictator Donald Trump. The UAW apparatus also hailed Stellantis’ decision last fall to cancel the product-line changeover at Brampton and instead award production of the Compass to its Belvidere, Illinois, plant starting in the 2027 model year.

In her September 16 letter to Joly, Payne praised the Carney government for its “strong, determined and decisive” response to Stellantis’ original announcement of the shift in Compass production to Belvidere and its pledge of “support to Canadian autoworkers.” She also welcomed the inclusion of Unifor officials in discussions last year, prior to the government “initiating” a “formal dispute resolution process” over the automaker’s failure to fulfill the commitments it made in exchange for hundreds of millions of dollars in federal and Ontario government subsidies.

Payne then went to ask if the government was party to the discussions

between Stellantis and the arms manufacturer Roshel, and if it is still seeking financial compensation from the automaker for canceling the retooling of Brampton Assembly.

If Joly has replied to the Unifor president's letter in the week since, the union has not revealed it.

All of this underscores the blind alley into which the Unifor bureaucracy has led autoworkers and the reactionary character of its nationalist-corporatist strategy, which is based on competing with the UAW as to who can assure the automakers the biggest return on their investment.

The *World Socialist Web Site* can't say anything definitive about what role the government has played in the Stellantis-Roshel purchase agreement.

But what is a matter of public record is that the Carney government is prioritizing the rapid expansion of Canada's military-industrial base; has previously voiced support for turning GM's shuttered CAMI plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, to military production, and is desperately courting global investment by intensifying the class-war assault on the working class. This includes, just in recent days, announcing a mega tax cut for big business, the privatization of the country's four largest airports, and the "normalization" of the arbitrary strikebreaking powers accorded the labour minister under Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code.

Repurposing auto plants for war production

Unifor had initially set a September 11 deadline to conclude bargaining for a new tentative agreement with Stellantis on the contracts covering its Windsor, Etobicoke and Brampton plants that expired September 20.

After the union was forced to "pause" negotiations due to Stellantis' insistence that the Brampton assembly plant must close, Payne hit the airwaves to press for government intervention. "Stellantis," she declared, "is 100 per cent serious about exiting Brampton. Everyone needs to understand this, especially our governments." Payne told CBC that the union's bargaining team was seeking contract language similar to the dubious "commitment" it secured in the August contract settlement with GM Canada regarding the fate of the CAMI plant. Under that agreement, the automaker pledged not to permanently close the idled Ingersoll CAMI plant while the search continued for other solutions, and that were Ottawa to award GM a military contract the CAMI plant would be the first in line to fill it.

The Carney government, building on the rearmament drive initiated by the Liberals under Justin Trudeau, has pledged to spend 5 percent of the GDP—or more than \$150 billion—per year on the military and related infrastructure by 2035. This will be paid for through sweeping public spending austerity, including the evisceration of Medicare and other social supports.

The Liberal government's Defence Industrial Strategy has the goal of producing 70 percent of the military's required equipment in Canada, an economic nationalist agenda like that advocated by Unifor, aimed at laying the basis for waging war.

In this effort, Roshel, a defense manufacturer specializing in the design, integration, and production of "combat-proven" armoured vehicles, is a key partner. It is headquartered in Brampton with a footprint in both Canada and the United States. The company president, Roman Shimonov, was a 15-year veteran in the officer corps of the Israeli Defence Force before taking positions in the country's security infrastructure.

Founded in 2016, the company rapidly gained procurement contracts, beginning production of its centerpiece Senator Armoured Car in 2018. Built in Brampton, with chassis shipped from Ford operations in the United States, the company has provided over 2,000 such vehicles to the

Ukrainian armed forces as part of the Liberal government's military aid package to the Zelensky government. It also has provided vehicles to the US ICE anti-immigrant force. Photographs have already shown them appearing on the streets of Minneapolis, where ICE agents shot and killed two people last January.

Significantly, Payne has said Unifor welcomes the decision of the arms-maker Roshel to invest in Brampton, just not by purchasing the Stellantis plant.

In recent remarks, Payne has said the union's preferred solution to the impasse with Stellantis would be to restore the Jeep Compass model to the Brampton plant, thereby ending plans to soon return more than 3,200 American workers from extended layoff.

As part of their renunciation of all the militant traditions of struggle jointly established by Canadian and US autoworkers in the 1930s and 1940s, the bureaucrats split the UAW along national lines four decades ago. They have pitted workers against their class brothers and sisters in the other country ever since, whipsawing jobs, wages and conditions to the lowest bidder.

Unifor and the UAW's lining up behind their respective ruling classes in the trade war is the logical outcome of their promotion of reactionary Canadian and American nationalism and both bureaucratic apparatuses' stalwart defence of capitalism.

A socialist-internationalist strategy to defend *all* auto workers

If auto workers are to fight back against layoffs, concessions and the militarization of the economy, they have to recognize that the current contract dispute is not in any sense of the word a traditional collective bargaining struggle.

Workers can only defend their interests through class struggle, rejecting the subordination of their jobs and livelihood to the profits of the automakers and the predatory interests of the rival imperialist and great-powers.

In opposition to Payne and the Unifor bureaucracy, those to whom Stellantis Canada workers should be turning are Stellantis workers and auto workers across North America and globally—not the Carney Liberal government (whose election the union backed) and Ontario's Doug Ford-led Tory government (with which the Brampton local union leadership has forged close ties.)

An appeal from the Stellantis Canada workers to oppose all multi-tier wages, speed-up and unsafe working conditions, and job cuts and plant closures would strike a powerful chord among workers in the United States, who are being radicalized and moving into struggle against Trump and everything he represents, and with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico and internationally.

Already, Volkswagen workers in Germany have formed an independent rank-and-file committee to fight mass layoffs while similar rank-and-file committees have been formed in industries across North America.

The most conscious expression of the upsurge of working-class opposition to war, dictatorship, job losses, and deteriorating living standards is the campaign for UAW president of socialist autoworker Will Lehman. Lehman advocates a rebellion of the rank and file against the bureaucracy through the building of democratically controlled rank-and-file committees to put power on the shop floor and abolish the union apparatus. He calls for the unification of workers in the US with their class brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico, and around the world to counterpose an international strategy for workers' power to the global onslaught on autoworkers and the entire working class by the ruling elite.

Canadian autoworkers should support Lehman's fight and develop cross-

border ties through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Workers across North America must advance their independent class interests by adopting a socialist-internationalist program and fighting together for the establishment of workers governments that puts social needs before private profit by transforming the banks and key industries like auto into public utilities.



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