Oppose Unite’s collaboration with Labour government over the jobs cull at Jaguar Land Rover

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Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), Britain’s largest carmaker and a subsidiary of the India-based Tata conglomerate, has announced plans to cut around 4,000 jobs globally over the next two years. The company, a major West Midlands employer, produces the Range Rover, Discovery, Defender and Jaguar brands.

The redundancies form part of a £1.7 billion cost-cutting programme aimed at reviving profitability.

JLR employs 44,000 people worldwide, 34,000 of them in the UK, with manufacturing sites at Solihull, Castle Bromwich, Wolverhampton, Hams Hall and Halewood on Merseyside, and headquarters in Coventry. The cuts are expected to fall on the 26,000 UK salaried staff—in management, marketing and research and development—rather than hourly-paid factory workers. The company stated, “We have informed our colleagues, and trade union partners that JLR is opening a voluntary redundancy programme offering salaried and management team members the opportunity to leave the business.” The scheme closes October 4.

JLR sales slumped by a fifth over two years, from £29 billion to £22.9 billion. Revenues fell 9.6 percent in the three months to June 30, while pre-tax profits plunged from £2.5 billion to £14 million in the year to March. Chief executive PB Balaji blamed fierce international competition—including 10 percent US tariffs, the costly transition to electric vehicles (EVs) and geopolitical disruption, the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine roiling the world economy and raising energy prices. These are not isolated cases but symptoms of deepening crisis of global capitalism. JLR like its competitors are seeking to offload this onto the backs of autoworkers.

The UK car industry is acutely exposed to tariff wars and geopolitical tensions, since most UK-built cars are exported—roughly three-quarters to four-fifths in 2024–25. Trade is tightly integrated with the EU: 56.7 percent of car exports went there in 2025, and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) reports about seven in ten cars sold in Britain come from Europe, with most components imported. Unlike BMW, JLR has no US factories, so its vehicles face Trump’s tariffs. To offset them, JLR is considering production through its new partnership with Stellantis, which has a US manufacturing base.

Chinese competition has hit JLR hard. Chery, owner of the Jaecoo and Omoda brands, has sold more than 91,000 vehicles in the UK so far this year, including the Jaecoo 7—dubbed the “Temu Range Rover.” JLR’s Land Rover sold 41,000 units, according to SMMT figures. The Range Rover, at around £100,000, costs more than three times the £30,000–£36,000 Chinese rival. Chery plans an R&D centre in the UK and is in talks with Nissan to build brands at Sunderland.

While committing £15–£18 billion over five years to new EV technology, JLR is downsizing its engineering capacity—the very workers who make new developments possible. This means driving up the productivity and exploitation of the engineers who remain. David Bailey, professor of business and economics, warned: “…if they cut for example too many workers in research and development that could affect their future ability to develop new cars.” JLR, he added, is “as strategically important as it gets for the UK economy.”

A meeting was convened on September 8 between JLR chief executive Balaji, the Labour government’s Business Secretary John Reynolds and Unite union general secretary Sharon Graham to agree the framework for how the mass jobs losses are to be implemented. Reynolds spelt out the terms: “A company the size of JLR, which is a huge British success story, at various times in its business cycle, the number of, directly, people it employs will change. If this is about making sure over time that the workforce is right to make the business as competitive as possible, that’s the conversation we need to have.”

The talk of trying to “mitigate job losses” was only to mitigate any organised opposition to the jobs massacre. Graham’s inclusion as one “trade union partners” of JLR was to ensure this. She stated: “It cannot be acceptable that workers again are made to pay the price for failings not of their making” while sitting down with the multi-millionaire chief executive and Labour’s corporate hatchet man to agree how this would be managed, not opposed.

Rather than mobilise Unite’s membership at JLR to unite both white and blue-collar workers Graham has done the opposite insisting “While the cuts planned are not expected to impact the UK manufacturing footprint or its supply chain, we need to ensure that no stone is left unturned to mitigate these jobs losses in the highly skilled ‘white collar workforce’”.

Unite members have seen the results of the Graham leadership dividing workers to work with management and the Labour government—above all the closure of the Stellantis-owned Vauxhall van plant in Luton in February 2025, ending 120 years of production and eliminating 1,200 jobs directly. Graham called no industrial action to unite the opposition with co-workers at Ellesmere Port where production was transferred to consolidate production of electric vehicles (EV). Unite officials instead offered further concessions on greater productivity to keep the plant open before enforcing the redundancy program.

The Luton closure was not isolated case. It was part of a global jobs massacre carried out by automakers under cover of the EV transition running into tens of thousands at Stellantis in Italy and the US - Nissan across its global operations - and Volkswagen in Germany—all overseen by pro-corporate unions defending profit interests. They are now committed to transforming industry for war production. The *Telegraph* reported that 15 auto component manufacturers are pursuing defence and aerospace contracts as a more reliable venture, at a time when governments are vastly increasing military spending at the expense of social and welfare provision.

At this year’s Trades Union Congress gathering, Unite presented a motion on “Industrial and economic policy” calling for “’buy British’ procurement rules to support UK jobs and deepen national security.” Graham has been the most vocal union leader in demanding increased military spending.

The Burnham government is committed to speeding up military and related infrastructure spending to meet 5 percent of GDP by 2035—the reason Keir Starmer was replaced by a parliamentary coup backed by the corporate and financial elite. Burnham’s promise to “reindustrialise” Britain is bound up with building an arms economy. As he declared in July, “Our commitment to NATO and the UK’s nuclear deterrent will be absolute.” Since then, he has escalated Britain’s involvement in the Ukraine war, soliciting warnings from Moscow of “inevitable, catastrophic consequences.”

On the continent, the German Trade Union Confederation backs the Conservative-social democratic government’s policies of war and rearmament and the conversion of car plants into arms factories while IG Metal on the advisory board Volkswagen has agreed to 50,000 job cuts. In the US, United Auto Workers under President Shawn Fain backs Trump’s tariffs, collaborates with thousands of job losses and supports turning car plants over to war production.

The entire car industry has been transformed by globalisation, of which Britain is an extreme example. A large, vertically integrated national industry producing 1.6 million cars and employing 250,000-plus manufacturing workers in 2000 has shrunk to a smaller, technologically driven, foreign-owned base producing 700,000–800,000 cars and employing around 130,000 manufacturing workers, dependent on internationally organised supply chains.

Autoworkers represent the internationalisation of the working class whose interests means the defence of jobs must be linked to opposition to trade and military war. This poses the need to break the hold of the pro-company union bureaucracy and link up their struggles across national borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

This perspective has found powerful support in Will Lehman’s campaign for president of the United Auto Workers. A Mack Trucks shopfloor worker running on a socialist program, Lehman insists that “replacing one bureaucrat with another will not change anything about the character of the bureaucracy” and calls for “the formation of rank-and-file committees composed of and controlled by workers, not bureaucrats.”

Rejecting the nationalism of the union apparatus, he declares that “as the sellers of our labor, we must unite internationally and not be undersold anywhere.” His campaign is a concrete expression of the IWA-RFC—”a growing movement to unify workers across plants, industries and countries.” JLR workers looking for a way to resist the jobs cull and restructuring should make contact and discuss how they can get involved in joining this struggle.