

Canadian workers slam GM plant closure as 'slap in face'

November 26 2018, by Lars Hagberg



A worker during a union session in Oshawa, Ontario on November 26, 2018 after General Motors announced plans to close its plant in the Canadian city

Canadian auto workers walked off the job in protest Monday as General Motors said it would shutter a plant that has been a fixture of Oshawa,

Ontario since 1953—drawing protests from union bosses and the country's prime minister.

News of the pending shutdown came as part of a massive restructuring announced earlier by the US auto giant that includes cutting thousands of jobs and closing seven [plants](#) worldwide to save US\$6 billion.

Workers put down their tools at the start of their shift, forcing assembly lines to shut down for the day.

In a press release, GM touted its "transformation for the future," focused on new electric and self-driving vehicles, while only mentioning the plant closures in short bullets.

Outside the front gate of the Oshawa plant, some gathered in the freezing rain to block trucks from delivering parts and to express their outrage over what they saw as a betrayal, by a company that in 2009 received billions from the Canadian and Ontario governments to maintain operations in Canada.

"It's a slap in the face," said one employee of seven years, who gave only her first name Jackie.

"I just bought a brand new truck, I'm kind of worried for my family. If GM leaves, I don't know what's going to happen," echoed Karin Wright, raising the prospect of having to sell her home and relocate.



An auto union member in Oshawa, Ontario—where General Motors has announced plans to shutter its plant next year

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he expressed his "deep disappointment" to General Motors chair and chief executive Mary Barra over its decision to halt production in Oshawa in December 2019.

Trudeau said the plant east of Toronto and its workers had been "part of the heart and soul" of the community for generations and pledged government support for their families.

In parliament, the prime minister said the move would have a "significant impact on the full community, as well as the network of suppliers."

'One hell of a fight'

GM employs 23,000 workers in Canada, including at this and two other car and engine assembly plants, research facilities and its Canadian subsidiary's headquarters.

The Oshawa closure will directly affect more than 2,500 workers who produce the Chevrolet Impala and the Cadillac XTS, as well as Silverado and Sierra heavy duty pick-up trucks.



General Motors announced the closure of a factory in Oshawa, in the Canadian province of Ontario, affecting more than 2,500 workers

Production began in 1953 and at its peak in the 1980s, the plant employed roughly 23,000 people. The plant recently underwent a retooling with the help of a Can\$500 million federal grant.

Its operations even became a talking point for US President Donald Trump during tense Canada-US negotiations to revamp a continental trade pact.

"Every time we have a problem with a point, I just put up a picture of a Chevrolet Impala," Trump said in off-the-record comments to Bloomberg that were reported by the Toronto Star.

Federal Economic Development Minister Navdeep Bains, speaking to reporters in the House of Commons foyer, signaled the government's intention to "continue to defend the automotive sector."

"There is a long-standing, proud history in terms of General Motors's presence in Oshawa, so now to see this plant close... is incredibly devastating," Bains said.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford vowed to "stand shoulder to shoulder" with affected workers. "We'll do whatever it takes to make sure they get back on their feet and they get proper (re)training."



General Motors workers left the plant in Oshawa, Ontario, on November 26, 2018, after the company announced its closure

When pressed about trying to get GM to reverse course, he replied: "that ship has already left the dock."

But Jerry Dias of Unifor, the Canadian autoworkers union, said promised to fight a shutdown that "makes no sense," noting workers had signed a contract with GM that guaranteed no Canadian plant closures until at least 2020.

"We told them, they are not closing our damn plant without one hell of a fight," he told members after meeting with GM executives.

© 2018 AFP

Citation: Canadian workers slam GM plant closure as 'slap in face' (2018, November 26)
retrieved 7 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-11-canadian-workers-slam-gm-closure.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.