

Workers speak out against sackings at Ford Australia

Our correspondents
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Ford Australia announced plans in early November to axe 640 permanent jobs at its Broadmeadows and Geelong plants in Victoria before the end of the year. Both the unions and the state Labor government are collaborating with Ford to ensure there is no resistance to the layoffs.

Rather than campaign to defend jobs, the unions are doing everything to help management to push workers to accept “voluntary” redundancies. The Bracks government has endorsed the cuts, saying Ford had no choice because of falling sales and profits.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers at Ford and in the Broadmeadows area—where unemployment officially stands at 13.4 percent—about the impending job losses. All were deeply concerned and angry about the impact on working families and especially the youth.

One worker who has been at Ford for 18 years said: “They say the redundancies are voluntary but they are offering packages to the men on light duties because of injury. The management is saying to them there is no job for you here, so you have to take the package. The unions do nothing to stop this.

“Some workers over 50 or 60 years old don’t mind leaving, but it is going to be hard for some of the younger ones. Also, it means that there are no jobs for young people in the community who are unemployed.

“They may put men back on when they launch a new model, but the number overall will be less. This happens all the time. When the people learn the job, they are cut back. So if you have a job that has three men, they give it to just two. It also makes for a pool of casuals that can be brought on when the company needs them.

“Many jobs have been lost over the time I have worked here. There were well over 7,000 but now there

are around 5,000. In 1995, they worked two shifts at the old paint shop with a total of 1,000. Since then they have built a new paint shop and there is only a total of around 200 for both shifts.

“If you ask any worker at Ford they will all tell you they do not trust the union. They have all had experiences with the union and know it is close to the company. When workers complain to the company about having to take on an extra workload or anything, the management says you have to accept it because there are thousands of other people waiting for your job. They say you are lucky to have a job and you should be grateful. When you complain to the union, the union tells you the same thing.

“Ford does not care about the workers they employ. They are in business to make profits and that’s all that counts for them. They say they have to lay off because of reducing profits, but if you add up what profit they made last year, and the years before, they are still ahead.”

Ford worker Leon said: “I feel there is no real security in the car industry anymore. It seems to be like the Titanic—it is sailing on troubled waters and it’s going down fast. First we had the sackings at Ford and now 200 at GMH [General Motors Holden]. And then there will be jobs going in the car parts manufacturers.

“I am not sure what the future holds anymore. Of course, Ford has said it has committed to a new model in around a year and half. This makes a lot of workers at Ford think their jobs are secure until then and perhaps beyond. But this does not guarantee anything really. Markets change and maybe they will not be able to sell the new model.

“There are some real terrible things going on in the car industry. At Ford they have casuals who they call in when they want them. They put them on for three

months or so, and then when they don't want them they just get rid of them. It is really awful. They don't even give them a real time framework. These are just nonsense jobs. There is no security for these workers. Because they are casual they can't even apply for a housing loan or even a loan for a car."

Moetu Orangi, a worker from New Zealand who now lives in Broadmeadows, said she was "upset and disgusted" about the Ford sackings.

"They come right on Christmas and it is very sad for those families. The union should have done something about this and not just tell workers to accept it. Many of these workers will not get full-time jobs again and will end up like me, working as a casual.

"I have been in Australia for almost three years. I had a permanent job. I worked at a car parts place but I got laid off when they sent the work elsewhere. Both permanents and casual were let go. Now I can't find permanent work. It is not easy being a casual, especially when you have a family to support like me.

"Now you are not even hired by the companies directly and you have to go through labour-hire agencies. You see an advert in the newspaper and ring up and it turns out to be an agency. They send you wherever they like. If you don't take what they give you, no matter what, then they will not give you anything in the future.

"To get any sort of employment you have to constantly chase it and you have to know how to work the agencies. It is enormously stressful trying to find jobs this way and also work under the conditions that exist in the companies where you are sent.

"Also, it is stressful because the permanent workers think you are trying to take their jobs and they are frightened. Employers hold it over them. It is a terrible atmosphere to work in.

"You can be at a company for three months and be getting settled in. Then they just tell you to go because after that time they have to make you permanent. You can't do anything about it because you are casual and the unions will do nothing for you. They don't do much for the full-time workers either. When they come out of a union meeting, you hear them say things like, 'that was a waste of time' or 'that was a lot of rubbish'."

Moetu said she was concerned about the Howard government's new industrial relations laws that abolish

long-standing working conditions, unfair dismissal laws and other basic rights. "These IR laws will make things worse. I don't think the unions are going to do anything about it. They will have protests but they don't actually do anything else."



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