

Employees speak on Chrysler dealership closure

Our reporting team
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On Tuesday, 789 Chrysler dealerships across the country were forced to close their doors as a federal bankruptcy court in New York upheld the Detroit automaker's restructuring plans. These dealerships represent one quarter of Chrysler's new car retailers.

The closure of the dealerships is part of a restructuring of the auto industry demanded by the Obama administration. General Motors, also in bankruptcy, is seeking to close more than two thousand dealerships. Tens of thousands of auto workers' jobs are being eliminated at the two companies, as factories are shuttered.

With the shutdown of Chrysler and GM's dealerships, the combined number of laid-off employees will number in the hundreds of thousands.

A team of WSWs reporters interviewed workers and managers yesterday at Livonia Chrysler Jeep on Plymouth Road, outside of Detroit, Michigan. In a stretch of road shorter than a mile, two GM dealerships are also slated to close. On Tuesday, the Jeep dealership's last day of operation, the lot stood empty of all vehicles.

Mick and Matthew, two car porters, spoke about the effect of the closing. "They're behind us," Matthew said of the surrounding community of Livonia.

Neither of the porters will have jobs following the closure. "I don't know what I'm going to do now," said Mick, saying he might try to go back to school.

"Obama's plan was supposed to help us," he continued. "It doesn't look like that's working out."

"Government Motors is closing them down as well," Mick said sardonically, pointing to the Buick dealership just across the street, which is on GM's list of dealerships that will be shut. GM has targeted 2,450 dealerships for closure based on its bankruptcy plan—40

percent of its total new car retailers.

"But what would have happened if the government didn't step in? They would have gone bankrupt anyway," Mick added.

Matthew noted that both his parents are now unemployed, after long careers in the auto industry. "My dad worked in a tool and die shop, but his plant closed down in March. My mom was laid off from Chrysler. Talk about politics or bigwigs all you like, but when it comes to your family, you've got to get by."

Inside, sales desks had been emptied and not a single car remained in the showroom. The dealership sold Chrysler products and Jeeps to Detroit area residents for almost three decades. The receptionist told us that she had been answering the phones all day and got many calls from customers and well-wishers who were saddened on hearing of their closing.

Tony, the manager of the body shop, began work at the dealership in 1982, three years after it was established. "It's wrong in every way, shape and form, what they're doing to us," he said. "We're one of the top dealerships in the whole country; we've been profitable for decades. And with the closing of this many service departments, there's no way the remaining dealers will be able to handle the overflow."

"They called on Thursday, and said we're shutting down," Tony added.

People in the area stopped by to show their support and express their frustration with the closures. One woman, outfitted in a red and white Red Wings jersey, pulled into the lot. "If I could buy everything you've got," she told Tony, "I would."

"I can't believe you'll all be out of work." She turned to us and added, "They've taken such good care of us."

An EMS responder who also stopped by said with shock, “They made you close down? I was hoping I’d drive by and see vehicles in the lot, but they made you close down. I think it’s wrong.”

Tony says that this response has been universal. “Our customers come in crying: they’re left in the dark. And as for employees, we have around 70 people who’ll be out of work.”



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