

Australia: Ford announces 440 job cuts in Victoria

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Ford Australia announced yesterday that it would axe 440 jobs from its plants in Geelong and Broadmeadows in Victoria. Workers would initially be offered so-called voluntary redundancies, but the company said it would start sacking workers if the targeted job cuts were not met.

According to Ford Australia chief executive Bob Graziano, production at the two plants will drop from 209 vehicles per day to 148 vehicles in November, down from around 300 in 2004. The two plants will employ only 1,120 factory workers after the latest round of sackings.

The announcement is part of widespread job destruction throughout manufacturing industry in Australia as the global economic crisis worsens. Workers at auto plants have been hard hit by decades of restructuring. In the late 1980s, Ford Australia employed over 10,000 workers. In 2008, Ford axed 880 jobs, and another 240 in 2010.

The job cuts have had a particularly devastating impact on the working class Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows. According to the most recent figures, the area's unemployment rate stands at 15.9 percent.

The Ford announcement had a particularly provocative character, occurring on the day that workers returned to the two plants following a production shutdown from July 6 to 16. Workers were effectively locked out on half pay during that period.

When the shutdown was announced last month, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that it foreshadowed further job cuts, as part of the sweeping restructuring of

the auto industry that has seen wages, conditions and jobs slashed. Further production shutdowns are scheduled on July 20 and 27.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claims that it knew nothing about the job shedding plans in advance, but that is simply not credible. At every stage, the unions have worked hand-in-glove with management to impose cutbacks to jobs and conditions at Ford and other car plants. Union bureaucrats sit on tripartite bodies with corporate executives and government ministers to map out plans for the industry.

The AMWU, which has not waged any campaign to defend jobs in auto or any other manufacturing industry, will also police these job cuts. In response to the announcement, the union's national secretary Paul Bastion appealed for further government handouts to Ford and for protectionist measures.

This nationalist perspective is simply a recipe for the continued subordination of workers to Ford management, a course that has already produced an unmitigated disaster. Under the banner of maintaining "international competitiveness," the unions have bludgeoned workers into accepting one round of restructuring after another. None of this has stopped the closure of auto plants and the axing of thousands of jobs.

The job cuts at Ford are part of the global reshaping of the auto industry since the financial crash began in 2008, with the corporations slashing jobs, wages and conditions. In the United States, Ford and the other auto giants, in collaboration with the United Auto Workers

(UAW) union, have imposed wage cuts of 50 percent on new hires, in the name of protecting “American jobs.” The chauvinist politics of the unions in the US and Australia only serve to pit autoworkers against each other along national lines, blocking a unified, independent struggle against the companies and the governments backing them.

In a media release yesterday, the Australian Council of Trade Unions made clear that it would collaborate even more closely with the auto corporations. “Following Ford Australia’s announcement that it will shed 440 jobs at its Broadmeadows and Geelong plants, unions are committed to working closely with the company and other carmakers to ensure Australia continues to have a strong motor vehicle industry,” it pledged.

The federal Labor government has responded defensively to Ford’s announcement, which came just months after the government handed \$34 million to the company, claiming it would result in the creation of 300 additional jobs. Since 2008, the government has allocated more than \$3 billion to bail out and subsidise the three remaining Australian car manufacturers, Ford, General Motors and Toyota. In February, General Motors announced that it would sack 100 workers, just one week after Toyota fired 350.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Julia Gillard referred favourably to Ford’s promise to maintain operations in Australia until 2016. Defending the corporate bailout, she said: “Imagine if we took that support away, how many thousands and thousands of job losses we’d be talking about right now?”

As the record shows, the real purpose of the bailout was not to defend jobs, but to facilitate the restructuring of the company to maintain its profits and competitiveness.

Workers are increasingly bitter and angry about the role of the government and unions. One Ford worker told the WSWS yesterday: “I don’t care much for the union. Every week they get the money from us, but they do nothing for us. They look after the company, not the workers. If something bad happens, they just

say sorry.”

To defend jobs, wages and working conditions, autoworkers must break out of the straightjacket of the unions, and create rank-and-file committees to wage an industrial and political struggle against management, governments and the unions. An appeal must be made to other sections of workers in Australia and internationally who are facing similar attacks.

Such a fight can be waged only on the basis of a new political perspective—the struggle for a workers’ government and socialist policies, including putting the banks and major corporations, such as the auto giants, under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class.



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