

“When the UAW folks play golf with the Fiat folks, what do you expect?”

Fiat Chrysler workers react to Sterling Heights Assembly job cuts

Shannon Jones
8 April 2016

Fiat Chrysler workers are reacting angrily to word that the company will eliminate a full shift, some 1,300 jobs, at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), north of Detroit effective July 5. Another 120 jobs are set to go at the nearby Sterling Heights Stamping Plant.

The layoffs follow the announcement earlier this year that the company will no longer produce small cars in the United States, with plans to outsource all the work to a third party supplier. SHAP currently builds the Chrysler 200, which is suffering from a sales downturn. The company had shut down the plant beginning February 1 due to excess inventory. Workers were set to return this week but the startup date was pushed back to Monday.

The layoffs, coming little more than five months after the signing of the UAW-Fiat Chrysler national contract, show that for all the union’s propaganda the deal was an utter betrayal, which only facilitated the attack on jobs. While Fiat Chrysler says laid off SHAP workers will be assigned to other jobs in the Detroit area, there is no indication where those job openings will occur or if lower seniority workers will be bumped out of jobs.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team visited the nearby Fiat Chrysler Warren Truck Assembly Plant north of Detroit on Thursday to get workers’ reactions to the announced layoffs. Fiat Chrysler has indicated that the Dodge Ram Truck, currently built at Warren Truck, will be moved to SHAP at an unspecified future date.

That leaves the fate of the Warren Truck facility uncertain. There are indications that the company will build the Jeep Wagoneer at Warren Truck, but that is a

slow selling vehicle that likely will not require an equivalent workforce to produce.

A number of workers indicated that the layoffs struck home since friends and family members would be impacted. Younger workers, especially temporary and part-time workers, expressed particular concern.

One veteran Warren Truck worker said that with the phasing out of its small cars the company was “setting itself up for failure. If they outsource all small cars, when the price of gas goes up it will be like 2009 all over again. We will all be laid off.

“The timing of the move of the Dodge Ram Truck is not certain. All we hear are rumors. Even if they do, I don’t see the point.”

One worker was even more blunt, “When the UAW folks play golf with the Fiat folks, what do you expect?” he remarked.

Another added, “I was never a big fan of the (2015) contract—never voted for it—but a lot of people were scared and gave in. The whole contract is full of crap.”

A younger tier-two worker said the recent contract was full of “gimmicks.” He continued, “It seemed like crap to me. It takes us too long to get to the top tier, just so Chrysler can keep more money in their pockets.”

“People can’t live on \$15 an hour,” one veteran worker said referring to the two-tier wage. “They can’t have any decent kind of life on that money.

“Yet the company is making tons of money. (Fiat Chrysler CEO) Sergio Marchionne has two mansions in Auburn Hills. One for his friends and one for his family.”

One worker expressed concern over cuts the UAW

agreed to relating to supplemental unemployment benefits that pays workers at portion of their lost wages while on layoff. “While it is good that we have sub pay, it ends at a certain point. Hopefully the layoffs won’t last so long that they run out of benefits.”

A worker with 16 years said, “It could be us. We don’t know what is going to happen here. The UAW is not saying anything.

“The last contract was garbage,” he said referring to the 2015 national agreement. “They got it passed using the same old scare tactics. A lot of people feel that way. The contract should have been way better. They are still hiding things.

“The problem is that the small cars are not selling. We don’t know exactly what is going to happen but this will probably mean that the new hires will be laid off. They say that they are bringing a new SUV to this plant, but who knows?”

A veteran worker told the WSWs that in terms of outsourcing “they have been doing it for years.

“I worked at the Mound Road Engine Plant before it closed. They outsourced all our jobs and I took a pay cut as a consequence. I haven’t had a raise in 14 years. All they gave us were lump sum payments.

“It got really bad once the UAW started owning Chrysler shares.”

Another worker remarked on the recent announcement by Ford that it would build a small car plant in Mexico. “Ford and Fiat Chrysler are outsourcing small cars. That means trouble for the temporary part-time workers. They will never move into full time jobs because they will move in laid off workers to fill the open slots.”

Remarking on the 2015 Fiat Chrysler-UAW agreement a worker said, “In the synopsis the UAW gave us it said there was a moratorium on outsourcing. That appears not to be true.

“They also told us that they would not change our medical. That wasn’t true either. Now they are restricting us in terms of where you can go for treatments. On top of that there will probably be more out of pocket costs.”

“Its all horrible,” a worker told the WSWs. “I think the union doesn’t fight. What did they negotiate for the tier two workers? Now they are going to be laid off. That is the hard part.”



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