"I am certain the UAW knew about this. They sell us out all the time."

Facing layoffs, Detroit area Fiat Chrysler workers denounce UAW

Shannon Jones
12 April 2016

Workers at the Fiat Chrysler Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) north of Detroit returned to work from temporary layoff Monday facing an uncertain future.

Last week the company announced that 1,300 workers at SHAP, and another 120 workers at the nearby Sterling Heights Stamping Plant, will be permanently laid off as of July 5 due to slow sales of the Chrysler 200, built at SHAP. The layoff represents a full production shift at the facility, which has been on partial shutdown for the major part of 2016.

Many workers told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* that the first they heard about the layoffs was from news reports. The layoffs are the first permanent job cuts at Fiat Chrysler since the 2009 bankruptcy, the first indication that the boom in car sales may be winding down.

Earlier this year Fiat Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne announced that the company will stop building small cars in the United States. The announcement covered both the Chrysler 200 and the Dodge Dart, which the company considers low profit vehicles. Fiat Chrysler says it wants to concentrate production on more profitable trucks and SUVs, and outsource small car production, likely to Mexico.

It is reported that Fiat Chrysler plans in the future to build the Dodge Ram truck at SHAP, but no exact timetable has been established. The Ram is currently built at the nearby Warren Truck Plant.

Fiat Chrysler says it currently has a three-month supply of the Dodge Dart, which, like the Chrysler 200, has experienced a sales slump. At this point FCA has not announced any production cuts at its Belvidere, Illinois facility that builds the Dart.

SHAP workers reacted angrily to the layoff announcement, expressing strong sentiment that the cuts had been the subject of union-management discussions prior to the UAW forcing through the new four-year labor agreement last October.

"All I can say is that it is BS," one SHAP worker told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*. "[UAW President] Dennis Williams said nothing about permanent layoffs or plant closings in our contract negotiations. Then he says to the media 'it wasn't unexpected.'

"Well, maybe not to him, but it sure is to us. And it is wrong that we hear it from the media before we hear it from the UAW.

"And they are sill hiring temporary workers at other plants when we are losing 1,300 jobs!"

A veteran worker said, "I am certain the UAW knew about this. They sell us out all the time. Hopefully we won't get ransacked as usual."

The layoffs are a direct consequence of the national UAW-Fiat Chrysler contract. The deal sanctioned the outsourcing of work by Fiat Chrysler and the other auto companies.

A Sterling Heights Assembly worker with six years said, "It was like there was a long term plan. We aren't getting any information. It is just happening. It will be by seniority, but we don't know the cutoff. They say they will 'transition' people, that is all I know."

A worker with two years seniority said, "We are going to get to the bottom of this. We want to hear what the UAW has to say. I have no doubt that I may be laid

© World Socialist Web Site

off. You have to have at least five years to be safe. Things are changing."

Workers told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that they were only now becoming aware of the full extent of the betrayal represented by the 2015 contract settlement. Workers at SHAP voted down the first sellout deal by a greater than two to one margin following an angry union meeting where workers confronted Norwood Jewell, UAW vice president for Fiat Chrysler. At the time there were rumors, which have since proved true, that the company planned to outsource the Chrysler 200.

A worker with five-and-a-half years said, "We don't know anything. I don't see how they can lay off people with years of seniority when at other plants they just hired someone two weeks ago."

She said that since the contract they had learned of cuts to supplemental unemployment benefits that pay a portion of the difference between a worker's wages and the amount covered by state unemployment benefits.

"I wasn't happy with the last contract. They made it seem at the time that we would have unlimited sub pay. Now you find out that our sub pay only continues to cover us for 26 weeks after our unemployment benefits run out.

"In today's economy you can't expect people to just go out and find a job making even half as much as what we were making. It is not going to happen."

The WSWS also spoke to David, a skilled trades worker on voluntary layoff at Sterling Heights Stamping. He said that under terms of the contract, laid off SHAP workers placed at other FCA facilities would lose all their accumulated seniority.

"SHAP is all newly hired workers. There are only 24 percent older (tier-one workers). They will all be sent to other plants—Warren Stamping, the Jeep plant—but they will start out at day one seniority. They already sent 500 Sterling people down to Warren Truck.

"The people that can't find jobs will have to work at McDonalds or Taco Bell.

"The UAW knew this before they even signed the contract. This had to be in the works since 2014. I am tired of the games and charades of the UAW. They constantly pull the wool over your eyes. They don't talk about any of this. It has been hush, hush since the signing of the contract."

He said that working conditions had deteriorated even further since the implementation of the 2015 agreement.

"As far as skilled trades, there are no lines of demarcation any more. They are long gone. One day I can be a pipefitter, the next an electrician or running a stamping press."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site