

Build rank-and-file committees

Fight GM layoffs! Defend the right to a job!

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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The World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter has issued the following statement to General Motors workers in the wake of the announcement of mass layoffs by the Detroit-based automaker.

In December, GM announced that it would eliminate a full shift and nearly 1,300 jobs at its Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant. At the same time, GM said it would idle five other plants in January, including the Detroit-Hamtramck plant, from one to three weeks, impacting some 10,000 workers. On top of the shift elimination at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant, GM earlier announced that it is suspending the third shift at its Lordstown, Ohio and Lansing River plants, impacting another 2,000 workers.

Nearly half of the workers being cut at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant are temporary workers. Others are contract workers for GM Manufacturing Subsystems who make poverty wages of as little as \$12-\$13 an hour. GM timed the announcement so that workers hired in April 2016 will not have one year seniority when the job cuts take place in March and therefore will not be eligible for supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB pay).

Ford and Fiat Chrysler have also recently carried out temporary layoffs, including at plants that build Ford's F-150 pickup truck and the temporary idling by Fiat Chrysler of its Sterling Heights Assembly Plant, north of Detroit, for retooling. Fiat Chrysler has stated its intention of stopping production of passenger cars in North America to focus on building more profitable trucks and SUVs.

The layoffs announced by General Motors last month will have a devastating impact on thousands of workers and their families. Many of these workers quit other jobs because GM and the UAW promised they would be made permanent employees. To add insult to injury, they are being laid off just weeks before many qualify for SUB pay.

GM executives claim the job cuts are necessary because of slowing sales and large inventories of unsold cars. Predictably, the UAW is taking management's side, telling workers that the auto companies have the right to cut jobs in order to maintain their profit levels. A UAW Local 22 statement said GM based its decision on "cost-efficiency."

Rank-and-file workers cannot let this stand. They must begin not with what is profitable for the company but what is necessary for workers and their families. They must insist that workers have the right to a job and a secure income.

It is not the fault of workers that the boom in car sales is ending. Workers have no say over the business decisions of the giant corporations, banks and government institutions. They are not responsible for the crisis of the capitalist profit system, which tosses workers out like used-up machines and lets them to starve next to the very riches they have created.

Corporate executives like GM CEO Mary Barra are driven by the most short-term considerations that are aimed, above all, at enriching the company's top shareholders. When their decisions produce a disaster, it is not the rich who pay—it's the workers!

Even as GM eliminates shifts in Michigan and Ohio and wipes out thousands of jobs, the company is forcing other workers to labor 50-60 hours a week to keep churning out profits.

We propose the following measure to prevent the layoffs: reduce the workweek of all GM workers to 30 hours a week, with no loss of pay, in order to share the available work and secure the livelihoods of all workers.

But the GM executives, UAW bureaucrats, big business politicians and the corporate media will all scream in unison: How can GM afford this?

Since the government bailout in 2009, GM has reaped \$50 billion in profits, including \$2.8 billion in the third quarter of last year, largely from slashing the wages and

benefits of workers.

The company is now squandering \$9 billion to buy back shares and drive up the value of its stock in order to further enrich billionaire hedge fund managers and other financial parasites. **If the \$9 billion were used to provide a secure income to the 50,000 GM workers in the US who produced the bulk of the company's profits, every hourly GM worker would get a \$180,000 bonus!**

Instead, with the blessing of the UAW, the company is throwing thousands of workers into the streets. If these job cuts are permitted without a fight, GM and other companies will be encouraged to wipe out thousands of other jobs to boost "shareholder value." What will this do to cities like Detroit, Lansing and Youngstown, Ohio, which have already been devastated by decades of deindustrialization, school closings and budget cuts?

The UAW will do nothing to defend workers. The 2015 UAW-Big Three contracts were rammed past the opposition of workers, using lies, threats and outright vote rigging, in order to make it easier for the corporations to slash jobs and create a disposable temporary workforce.

The pro-capitalist UAW functions as an instrument of corporate management and the government, not as a workers organization. If a fight is to be carried out, workers must take the initiative and wage it themselves.

The Socialist Equality Party urges workers to elect rank-and-file committees to discuss and plan opposition to the layoffs. This committee should reach out to other GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers facing layoffs and to workers throughout the metropolitan Detroit area. Rallies, demonstrations and other protests should be organized to mobilize the working class to prevent the layoffs being planned for March 5.

This month marks the 80th anniversary of the Flint sit-down strike against GM. That struggle, led by socialists and left-wing militant workers, inspired millions of workers throughout the country to rebel against the conditions of industrial slavery that prevailed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The methods of the class struggle must be revived. Such a fight would rapidly win the support of millions of workers and young people throughout Detroit, the US and the world, who want the right to a good paying job.

To wage a real struggle, workers must reject the economic nationalism that has long been promoted by the UAW to subordinate workers to the profit interests of their "own" corporate bosses. The UAW is promoting the lie that the nationalist trade policies of Trump will defend workers' jobs. In reality his "Make a America Great

Again" slogan is the cover for corporate tax cuts, the elimination of health, safety and environmental protections, and the destruction of Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. In other words, America will be great for the billionaires and a living hell for the working class.

GM and other global corporations are attacking the jobs of workers all over the world, and workers in Mexico, China, Brazil and other countries are fighting back. US autoworkers should fight to unite with their class brothers and sisters in order to wage a common struggle.

The fight to defend jobs above all is a political fight against both big business parties and the corporate-controlled economic system. Trump is assembling a government of billionaires, generals and arch reactionaries determined to destroy every reform over the last century. What would have happened if Clinton had won, however, can be seen by the record of Obama, who slashed autoworkers' wages and oversaw the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build a mass political movement of the working class, independent of and opposed to both capitalist parties. If economic life is to be reorganized in a rational way, to meet the needs of those who produce society's wealth not the billionaire exploiters, then workers must replace capitalism with socialism.

GM, Ford and Chrysler must be transformed into publicly owned enterprises in order to produce safe and affordable transportation and a decent living for autoworkers, instead of channeling even more money into the pockets of the super-rich.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* pledges to assist workers in organizing opposition. To contact us, click here.



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