

Protest by Illinois auto parts workers wins broad support on Facebook

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A video posted on Facebook of police removing angry workers from the cafeteria of a factory in Belvidere, Illinois has been widely shared and viewed, drawing attention to the brutal treatment routinely meted out by corporate America to workers.

Some 258 workers at the Android II plant, an auto supplier that builds engines for Fiat Chrysler (FCA), were laid off from their jobs on December 23, two days before Christmas, after the company said the automaker declined to renew its contract. Workers say the company shortchanged them in their final paycheck, which did not include contractually stipulated vacation pay. In some cases, the amounts owed were substantial—as much as \$1,500 after taxes.

Unable to get answers from local plant management a few days later, scores of workers went to another Android factory and asked to speak to management. The plant manager invited the workers to wait in the company's cafeteria, but then summoned police, who escorted workers outside. The entire confrontation was recorded and posted on Facebook. The post had some 46,000 views at the time of this writing.

Android is a multi-national corporation based in Auburn Hills, Michigan that specializes in auto parts production and logistics. It has 16 plants in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico and Spain.

Workers at Android II are members of United Auto Workers Local 1268, which also serves as the bargaining agent for workers at the huge Fiat Chrysler Belvidere Assembly Plant. The same day that the Android II plant was shuttered, Belvidere Assembly closed for a five-month retooling. The facility is being converted from production of the Jeep Compass and Jeep Patriot in order to produce the new Jeep Cherokee. Belvidere assembly ended production of the Dodge Dart in September in the wake of the announcement by

FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne that the company was ending small car production in North America.

The Local 1268 web site did not contain any mention of the protest by Android II workers, nor has the UAW issued any statement on their fight. A call by this reporter to Local 1268 was not returned.

At least four auto parts plants in the Belvidere area that made parts for Fiat Chrysler were impacted by the shutdown. At least 700 workers were affected by job cuts. Unlike FCA workers, workers at auto parts suppliers are not eligible for supplementary unemployment benefits (SUB). Workers at parts suppliers typically make far less than workers at assembly plants, sometimes earning poverty wages of \$11 or \$12 an hour.

Bridget Moyer, the Android II worker who posted the video of the confrontation with management and who has emerged as a spokesperson for the workers, spoke to a local web site, Rockfordscanner.com, after the protest. She said that in some cases the company owed workers more than 120 hours of accumulated vacation pay. “The contract I am speaking of is a law abiding contract they are breaking... Not only did they take our jobs, but now, two days after Christmas we are finding out we also lost our vacation pay.”

In other comments posted on Facebook, Moyer says, “The plant manager and human resource manager were giving us excuses, but really not giving us answers. They invited us into the cafeteria to speak to them; they really didn't speak to us. In the process they called the police and had us escorted out of the building.

“From the get go this company has done nothing but screw all of us over. They are not giving us answers. They are saying corporate agreed to this... we just want answers and we got kicked off the property.”

The Facebook video shows Android II plant workers

peacefully assembled in the company cafeteria. Police arrive and tell the workers they cannot force the plant management to provide any information and that workers must leave the plant because it is private property.

The layoff of Android II workers in Belvidere comes amidst a spate of layoffs by the Detroit-based auto companies as the car sales boom of the past several years appears to be winding down. The UAW's role has been to facilitate the layoffs, smothering any opposition to the job cuts, which it insists are necessary to preserve management's "cost-efficiency."

In the case of the temporary closure of the Belvidere plant, the UAW has hailed the restructuring, which has forced the 4,500 workers who are being laid off to subsist on SUB pay and unemployment benefits amounting to about 74 percent of their standard pay. Temporary and contract workers, who under terms of the 2015 UAW national contract, comprise an expanded portion of the workforce, are not even eligible for SUB benefits, nor are regular employees with less than one year seniority.

Last summer, FCA eliminated a shift at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) north of Detroit, as a move to phase out production of the Chrysler 200 passenger car. SHAP was indefinitely closed in December as it retooled for the production of the new Dodge Ram. Altogether, some 3,000 workers have been impacted by the SHAP layoffs, with temporary and part-time workers again taking the hardest hit.

The decision by FCA and other automakers to focus production on larger, less fuel efficient vehicles such as light trucks and SUVs, leaves automakers vulnerable if gas prices again spike. As always, workers will bear the brunt of any collapse in the car market. Meanwhile, the Detroit automakers continue to post near-record profits, with GM handing out some \$9 billion in dividends and stock buybacks to investors while at the same time laying off workers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the *Auto Workers Newsletter* calls for the widest support for the Android II workers and all autoworkers facing layoff. We insist that a job and secure income is a right, not a privilege. This struggle requires the initiative of autoworkers by building rank-and-file committees in a rebellion against the pro-corporate UAW.



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