

“The union is not for us”

## Detroit autoworkers speak out against GM layoffs

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Detroit-area autoworkers are continuing to speak out against the impending elimination of a full shift, affecting 1,300 workers, at the General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck plant. The layoffs are set for March 5. In the meantime, workers are being subjected to the intermittent closure of the plant, which plays havoc with their lives and finances.

Most of those being laid off are workers with less than one year seniority, making them ineligible to collect supplementary unemployment benefits (SUB). Many quit jobs at other companies or even moved to Detroit from out of state to work at GM.

The job cuts at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant are part of a broader series of layoffs by GM and the other carmakers as the sales boom of recent years slows. GM is eliminating shifts at its Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant and at its Lansing Grand River plant in Michigan.

In December, Fiat Chrysler (FCA) closed its Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) north of Detroit for retooling, forcing workers onto long term unemployment while the facility is changed over for production of the new Dodge Ram. Last July, FCA eliminated a full shift at the plant as it phased out production of the Chrysler 200 passenger car. The layoff forced 1,400 workers to seek transfers to other plants or go onto the unemployment rolls.

Ford has also put on temporary shutdown several plants that build the F-150 pickup truck, which has been a top seller.

The layoffs are having a ripple effect in the Detroit area. Earlier this week, Focus: HOPE Companies announced plans to lay off 120 people who work for an auto parts supplier that is losing its contract with GM. The affected employees were contracted out to work for

Android-Detroit LLC, which is a supplier for the Detroit-Hamtramck plant.

Last month, Android workers in Illinois staged a protest after the company shortchanged them on their final check, which was supposed to include accumulated vacation pay.

A veteran worker at GM Detroit-Hamtramck said that even workers with higher seniority were concerned over their jobs, feeling that more layoffs could follow. Many workers are transferring out, some going to the Romulus, Michigan plant, where there haven't been layoffs.

“You never know what will happen, especially with Trump taking office,” the worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “Workers are worried. I was once laid off for over two years.

“If you don't have a lot of seniority, you have a problem. The younger workers, if they have less than one year, get nothing.”

Even if they don't face permanent layoff, workers at the plant are struggling to maintain their finances amid the constant threat of temporary layoffs.

“If we are laid off, we have to wait a week to file for unemployment benefits. Therefore, we will end up missing a check. And it is right after the holidays, so people spent more money. If you don't have a lot of money saved, you have got a problem,” said the veteran worker.

“If you make any mistakes on the unemployment forms you don't get paid. They ask too many questions. They want you to mess up.”

An electrician said, “I don't know how long it's been since I worked just 8 hours, but they are still laying off. It doesn't seem right. I thought they had record profits.

“I put in for a transfer to another plant, but we will see. I don’t get SUB pay because I have been here less than one year.”

On Thursday, a *World Socialist Web Site* campaign team visited the GM Detroit-Hamtramck plant and distributed copies of a statement calling for the formation of a rank-and-file committee to oppose the impending layoffs. It called on workers to reject the claim by the United Auto Workers union and GM that there was no money to preserve jobs, under conditions where management was spending billions on share buybacks to drive up the price of company stock.

Many workers stopped to take copies of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* and discuss the impact of the impending jobs cuts.

Younger workers, many of whom were hired in as temporary workers or contract workers, are going to be particularly hard hit. Many of those being laid off are employed by GM Subsystems LLC, supposedly an outside contractor, but in reality a front company for GM. These workers get substandard pay and benefits and do not accumulate companywide seniority.

A GM Subsystems worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “I worked at the Lake Orion GM plant for five years and was then laid off. After that I came here, and I am getting laid off again.

“We make less money for doing the same work as the GM employees. As for profit-sharing, they cut us out. All we will collect are state unemployment benefits when we are laid off.

“The UAW put us under a separate contract, and we are getting basically one-half of what the GM workers are getting paid. They lied to us and said we would be put in a hiring pool for GM. But they hired 700-800 people off the street and left us working at LLC.”

Rob, a second-tier worker at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant, said he had also transferred from Lake Orion. “There has been a bad reaction” to the layoffs, he said. “The shutdown of the shift was a shock, everyone was blindsided. I don’t think I will be laid off, but I am not sure. I could be bumped down or laid off.”

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* also contacted a senior worker at SHAP, who said she had been following the situation at GM. “There were a lot of new workers there,” she said. “My girlfriend’s son was hired in. He got laid off over the holiday and I am not sure if he is going back.”

She said the prolonged shutdown of SHAP was creating a great deal of hardship. “People feel like they have no control. We don’t know when we are coming back. Some workers’ SUB is running out. Some have gone to work at other plants. Everything is up in the air. People don’t know what will happen.”

The United Auto Workers has given its tacit support to the layoffs, issuing no statement except to say that the decision by GM was based on “cost efficiency.” Many workers contacted by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* said they suspected the union had advance knowledge of the layoffs and chose to keep silent.

Rob said, “I think workers know that they won’t do anything. They are still saying nothing about it.”

The veteran Detroit-Hamtramck worker said, “The union is not for us. They are on the other side. This should not have happened. I think they knew this was going to happen.”

She said because the UAW agreed to profit-sharing instead of raises, a large portion of workers’ pay ended up going to taxes. “Last year it was \$11,000, but \$6,000 of that went for taxes. That was terrible. Then the UAW came and took a big chunk out of it for dues. They do what they want to do.”



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