

“Sure he wants jobs in America—by lowering our wages”

GM autoworkers speak out on layoffs and Trump

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Autoworkers in the Detroit area denounced the thousands of layoffs being carried out by General Motors and expressed their distrust of the new Trump administration in interviews conducted by the *World Socialist Web Site* Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Donald Trump held a breakfast with the top executives of General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) and assured them that his administration would slash corporate taxes from 35 to 15 or 20 percent and eliminate hundreds of occupational safety, consumer and environmental regulations, including mandates for higher fuel efficiency.

The executives, including GM CEO Mary Barra, tapped by Trump for his new corporate competitive board, gushed over Trump’s “pro-growth policies.” Stocks of the Big Three auto companies shot up Wednesday as part of the stock exchange rally that saw the Dow Jones Industrial Index close above the 20,000-point mark.

Amid all the grand-standing about new investments and jobs, GM is going ahead with its plans, announced late last year, to cut 3,300 jobs. The giant automaker is eliminating shifts at assembly plants in Detroit and Lansing, Michigan and at the Lordstown factory near Youngstown, Ohio, halfway between Pittsburgh and Cleveland.

Last Friday was the last day of work for 1,202 hourly and 43 salaried employees on the third shift at the Lordstown assembly plant, which produces the Chevrolet Cruze small car model. The job cuts were the biggest at the massive factory complex since 1980. Another 116 workers at nearby component manufacturers—Magna Seating and Alliance Solutions Group—are also losing their jobs.

Last week was also the last for around 800 hourly and 29 salaried workers on the third shift at the Lansing Grand River Assembly Plant in the Michigan state capital, which produces the Cadillac ATS and CTS models and the Chevrolet Camaro. The other two shifts are on temporary layoff and are scheduled to return to work on January 30.

GM is eliminating the second shift at its Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant—the only plant the company has left in Detroit—between March 6 and 19, wiping out 1,300 jobs. The factory builds the Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid electric, Cadillac CT6, Chevrolet Impala and Buick LaCrosse. The second shift was added just nine months ago and the timing of the layoffs, just before hundreds of temporary workers who were promised full-time jobs reached their first anniversary, will deprive them of transfer rights and Supplemental Unemployment Benefits.

“A lot of workers who had the seniority have already transferred out. The rest of us don’t know what to do,” said Larry, a young worker at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant. “I’m a temp and I guess there is no hope for us unless they rehire sometime in the future. Lots of workers quit once they made the announcement and more are quitting every day. They were so short of people that it affected general assembly.

“I have a wife and kids and it’s going to hurt. We need this job. I’m only going to get unemployment benefits for a few months. GM is also cancelling shifts at other plants.

My dad retired from Ford and he told me about layoffs. This is the first time I’ve experienced it firsthand.

“Trump is talking about getting jobs back from Mexico and taxing companies if they import cars. Sure, he wants jobs in America—by lowering our wages. During his campaign, he said he thought autoworkers were paid too much.

“We’re in that plant producing 600 cars a day. Impalas, Buicks and Cadillacs sell from \$25,000 to \$50,000 apiece. They just added a second shift in April and used us to overproduce—and now they are cutting us loose. They did us dirty with the layoffs right before Christmas.”

Referring to the role of the United Auto Workers, Larry said, “The UAW isn’t going to do anything for our jobs. They only do what management wants. We complain and complain to the union committee and they don’t do anything for us. The assembly line went down for an hour and a half

because one of the robots broke down. The union canvassed all the workers to see if we wanted to work 11 hours that day. We said, ‘hell no, we’re ready to go home.’ The company still made us work 11 hours. What was the point of asking us? The union doesn’t care.”

Another Detroit-Hamtramck worker, Bob, quit his longtime job at US Steel to get what he thought would be more job security in the auto industry. He is now being forced to uproot his family and move to Spring Hill, Tennessee to work at another GM plant.

“I thought Trump would be good for the country. I don’t understand it. GM is making record profits and we’re still being laid off. They say there are too many unsold cars but we were working overtime, through our lunch and other breaks.

“I’m an American and I’m for American workers. But it makes sense to unite with workers in other countries. We’re working for the same companies. Things are getting worse, not better. It’s crazy the stock market hit 20,000 and it seems like we’re going backwards, not forwards.”

Danny, another young worker at the Detroit plant, expressed his distrust of Trump but said he had hoped the GM layoffs had been part of Trump’s recent discussion with the GM CEO. He added, however, “Trump never has evidence for anything he says. He is signing these executive orders and I feel he is going to send this country into another depression.”

While criticizing the auto companies for shifting production to Mexico and China, Trump has made it clear he endorses them moving from state to state to obtain lower taxes and wages. Last May he told the *Detroit News*, “You can go to different parts of the United States and then ultimately you’d do full-circle—you’ll come back to Michigan because those guys are going to want their jobs back even if it is less ... We can do the rotation in the United States—it doesn’t have to be in Mexico.” After Michigan “loses a couple of plants—all of sudden you’ll make good deals in your own area.”

In so far as autoworkers have illusions in Trump this is largely due to the United Auto Workers, which has promoted “Buy American” nationalism for decades while collaborating with the auto bosses to slash jobs and labor costs. The UAW is hostile to uniting autoworkers around the world in a common struggle against the global auto giants.

After justifying their campaign for Hillary Clinton on the basis that the election of Trump would be catastrophic for workers, the UAW and other unions have cozied up to the ultra-right president. In a statement, UAW President Dennis Williams praised Trump for withdrawing from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) trade pact, saying this was “a victory for American workers and families.”

This is a lie. Trump is only seeking to get more favorable terms for US-based transnationals while ramping up the class war on US workers.

When our reporter pointed this out, the GM worker said, “workers are more worried than anything,” about the impact of Trump’s policies. He said he had been extremely reluctant to support either Clinton or Trump in the elections. “Nothing positive was coming from either side. It sounded like Clinton wanted to start something with Russia.”

Keith, a young worker at the Fiat Chrysler truck plant in the Detroit suburb of Warren, Michigan said he had just heard about the GM layoffs. “If you are supposed to be saving jobs, why the layoffs? What we are hearing through the grapevine is that Trump wants to bring jobs back, but he wants us to take pay cuts. He thinks we make too much money.

“He must have scheduled the meeting with the auto executives a long time beforehand. It makes me think that bad things are going to happen.”

Referring to the GM job cuts, a veteran Warren Truck worker added, “That is unfair to the workers. How are you supposed to survive without jobs?”

When asked about Trump’s claim that he would create jobs based on his program of economic nationalism he said, “I will believe it when I see it. The Americans he cares about are the wealthy. I don’t think he cares about the working man.”

Responding to the mass protests against the Trump administration over the weekend he said, “They should have done that a long time ago. I think people realize that the only thing Trump is out for is Corporate America.”

He said he was disturbed by Trump’s plans to build a wall with Mexico and his statements denouncing immigrants. “America was branded as a ‘land of the free,’ but they are still persecuting immigrants.”



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