

“It’s not the fault of Mexican or Chinese workers”

# 1,200 GM workers laid off at Lordstown plant in Ohio

Jerry White  
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January 20 was the last day of work for 1,202 hourly workers and 43 salaried employees at the General Motors Lordstown Assembly Plant in Ohio. The workers who lost their jobs were among 2,000 GM workers laid off in Ohio and Lansing, Michigan on the same day that Donald Trump delivered his Inaugural Address, posturing as a defender of the American worker.

Another 1,300 GM workers at the Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant face the loss of their jobs when GM phases out the second shift at its only remaining Detroit plant between March 6 and 19. The layoffs, the first by GM in six years, are an ominous sign that the boom in auto sales that followed the 2008 crash and 2009 bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler is coming to an end.

The job cuts at Lordstown are the biggest layoffs since 1980 at the sprawling assembly and stamping plant complex, located halfway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. The company added a third shift to the plant in 2010 when it launched its Chevrolet Cruze small passenger car, and has been operating at full capacity.

Many of the workers on the third shift are lower paid temporary workers who have been hired or rehired over the last several years. The United Auto Workers exploited the precarious position of these workers in an attempt to pressure them to vote for the 2015 UAW-GM agreement, which facilitates the layoff of workers. They have now been thrown out onto the streets and as of today will no longer have medical benefits for themselves and their families.

UAW locals 1112 and 1714 did not even make a pretense of opposing the layoffs and instead are echoing GM’s claims that the layoffs are necessary because of falling sales of the Cruze model. “It’s supply and demand, and right now the demand is not there for what

we have,” said Glenn Johnson, president of UAW Local 1112 at the stamping division of the Lordstown plant.

The Facebook pages of the two locals contain instructions on how to fill out unemployment claims, seek state assistance to prevent home foreclosures and refinance student loans.

“The union and GM only brought in the temporary workers to get them to ratify the contract,” Tonya, a veteran Lordstown worker, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “I told them not to vote ‘yes.’ The UAW told the workers to vote ‘yes’ and promised the company would hire them as full-time workers. Now after the contract got passed they are laying off these workers. It’s so wrong the way people are treated. It makes me sick to my stomach.

“The union local is going on about giving us free jackets and book bags marking the 50th anniversary of the Lordstown plant. I told the workers it’s not for free—we paid for that with our union dues. Now we can wear the jacket to keep warm when they kick us out of the plant and use the book bags to pack our stuff when we clear out our lockers. That’s GM and the UAW for you.

“I had to relocate to get a job here and they did not give me my full corporate seniority. The UAW International and the local allowed that. I could retire soon but I probably won’t be able to because they screwed us out of our seniority when we came to GM from Delphi. The UAW and GM negotiated after Delphi declared bankruptcy and they cut our wages and pensions.”

The layoffs follow the public announcements by GM executives that they were investing to expand operations in the US and shifting some production from plants in Mexico. Trump hailed the announcement by GM and other automakers as proof of the success of his “America First” economic nationalism. In reality, the auto

bosses—including GM CEO Mary Barra, who has been tapped by Trump for a seat on his corporate competitiveness board—anticipate massive profits from Trump’s plan to slash corporate taxes and regulations and use threats of trade war to expand their overseas markets.

While GM has spent billions of the profits it has extracted from workers to finance stock buybacks and dividend payouts to its richest stockholders, it is just getting started on the destruction of jobs and living standards. For its part, the UAW wants to help Trump divert the social anger that will erupt over his coming attacks with anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese chauvinism.

“It’s not the fault of Mexican or Chinese workers,” Tonya said. “They are trying to find jobs just like American workers. Our kids can’t go around today and move from one job to another, like we used to. I’m scared for my grandkids that there is going to be a war.

“The Congress, the presidency, they are not for you. If I would meet Trump, he would dog me and have nothing to do with me. We work to feed the president, the Congress and make sure they are all wealthy. I don’t hate the Mexicans—it’s the corporations that are cutting our jobs and wages and our union is allowing it.

“I didn’t want to vote for Trump—he’s against people making money other than himself and the rich. My friend told me Trump was going to put a big tax on GM for importing cars from its factories in Mexico. I didn’t like Clinton, so I voted for him. But now he is sucking face with the GM and Ford executives and is going to cut some deal for them.”

“I’m not liking what is going on. I knew Trump was too good to be true. A lot of workers here voted for him, me included. Right now, I don’t know if I regret it and I’m confused and angry. You don’t know who to trust. You don’t trust the company and, after 22 years as a UAW member, I’m sad to say I don’t trust them either.”



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