“It’s like we’re working for a temporary agency”

As deadline nears, autoworkers speak on General Motors layoffs in Detroit

Shannon Jones
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With only weeks to go before the layoff of some 1,300 workers at the General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant, opposition is mounting to the job cuts. The second shift at the factory that builds the Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid electric, Cadillac CT6, Chevrolet Impala and Buick LaCrosse is set to be phased out between March 6 and 19.

Many of the workers being affected are temporary workers who have no recall rights and are not eligible for Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB). The timing of the layoffs, just before hundreds of workers will reach their one-year anniversary, which would qualify them for transfer rights, is a slap in the face to those who quit jobs at other companies seeking full-time work at GM.

The job cuts at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant follow the layoffs of 2,000 GM workers at the Lordstown, Assembly Plant in Ohio and the Lansing Grand River plant in Michigan. The United Auto Workers has not even made a pretense of opposing these job cuts, merely advising workers on how to collect state unemployment benefits.

The layoffs will have a devastating impact in Detroit, a city already suffering from an official unemployment rate of near 10 percent and a child poverty rate of more than 59 percent. Detroit Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan, while wasting no opportunity to tout the so-called comeback of city, has not said a word about the loss of 1,300 jobs at the factory, and more at companies which supply GM.

One GM Detroit-Hamtramck worker who is facing layoff told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, “They are not telling us anything. It is all a joke. In the next two to three weeks I am going to be searching for another job.

“If they cared about us, they would be placing workers in other plants or creating more jobs in the plant. The same time they are laying us off they are having others work 11 or 12 hours a day doing two or three jobs.”

Another Detroit-Hamtramck worker said, “I quit another job paying more than GM to work here.

“GM pays analysts $100,000 and more to predict sales. You tell me they didn’t know this was coming? They say they are building too many cars and at the same time they are working us to the bone until the last day. It is like we are working for a temporary agency.

“When they made the announcement they first had an executive on stage bragging about how great auto sales were and all the profits they were making. Then at the end they slipped in, ‘and, oh yes, we are laying off a shift.’ What a slap in the face!”

A worker at the Chicago Ford Assembly Plant said he supported the fight of the GM workers. “We have the same issue here with the use of Temporary Part Time (TPT) workers. Right now, we have all these TPTs working and there is no talk of ever converting them to full-time workers. A lot have been on TPT status for over a year and don’t qualify for profit-sharing.

“It is hard on them if they have a family to support, especially if they are single mothers. I can’t see why they aren’t giving them the opportunity to work full-time. It makes me wonder if they are going to get rid of the third shift here too.”

A tier-two worker at Fiat Chrysler’s Jefferson Assembly in Detroit said, “I stand in support of the workers at GM in defense of their jobs. I believe it is a fight for all autoworkers. I think all workers should be

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concerned. It is a precursor of what could happen at other plants. [Fiat Chrysler CEO] Sergio Marchionne has threatened to move jobs if our quality doesn't improve."

"The UAW is not with us. We cannot rely on them to fight for us."

Workers contracted by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* also expressed opposition to the attempts by the Trump administration and the United Auto Workers to divert anger at US job losses towards workers in Mexico and other countries. Many said they saw through the divisive nationalism being promoted by Trump with the support of the UAW.

A GM Detroit Hamtramck worker said, "Trump is bringing down the US. He is being racist and biased about everything. He is showing his true colors." Speaking about the ban on refugees and travelers from predominantly Muslim countries, he said, "Everyone is not a terrorist from these countries.

"Everything is going for the worse, not the better. The only thing Trump did his first week was to say 'build that wall.' That's a waste of time when kids are starving. I have good friends who are Mexican. It is a disgrace. For years, we fought for freedom of speech. Now they are trying to take that away. I don't see anything good coming from it."

The Ford worker said, "It is not foreign workers, it is our own companies seeking to make more profits. They are making tons of money, but they want to make even more. Their goal is to help their shareholders, not us."

The Jefferson worker said, "All workers have the same interests. An injury to one is an injury to all. Trump is hell bent on saying the issue is Mexico, when the issue is here. The rich are benefitting by pitting workers against each other."

Another GM Detroit-Hamtramck worker said, "I feel whatever Trump's intention with the immigration ban, it is discriminatory. He is doing it in a way so that it violates the Bill of Rights. I don't agree with the whole thing. We are in a very dangerous situation."

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* are urging GM workers to elect a rank-and-file committee to discuss a strategy to fight the job cuts. These committees should turn out and build support among workers at other GM factories and workers at Ford, Fiat Chrysler, auto parts suppliers, as well as other sections of workers, young people and unemployed workers in the community. Rallies and demonstrations should be organized as part of the fight to prevent the layoffs.

These and other proposals will be discussed at a public meeting being held Saturday, February 11 at Wayne State University in Detroit. The meeting details are as follows:

No to GM layoffs! Defend the right to a job!

Saturday, February 11, 1:30 p.m. Eastern Time
Wayne State University
State Hall Room 106
5143 Cass Ave,
Detroit MI
(Live audio dial-in: 213-416-1560 (US) or 438-800-2937 (Canada), and enter the PIN: 581 991 086#)

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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