

On eve of GM Detroit layoffs

Jeep announces partial shutdown of Toledo, Ohio complex

Shannon Jones
17 February 2017

The deadline for the elimination of the second shift at the General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant is fast approaching with workers expressing anger and concern over their fate as the United Auto Workers collaborates with management to throw some 1,300 workers into the street.

GM workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* said that the UAW is now indicating that March 3 will be the last day for the second shift at the plant. These job cuts follow the layoff of some 2,000 workers at the GM Lordstown plant outside of Warren, Ohio and the GM Grand River plant in Lansing, Michigan. The cuts point to a broader slowdown in the auto industry as the sales boom of the past several years winds down.

This week the *Toledo Blade* announced that 3,200 workers at the Fiat Chrysler Jeep complex would be laid off for six months while the plant is retooled for a new version of the Jeep Wrangler. The changeover is part of a restructuring process, whose long-term effect on employment is still not clear. It involves FCA ending passenger car production in the US while the company concentrates on more profitable trucks and SUVs. Workers at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant north of Detroit remain on long-term layoff after FCA ended production of the Chrysler 200 passenger car previously built at that facility.

A Jeep worker contacted by the *Autoworker Newsletter* said that while permanent employees affected by the layoff at Jeep are covered by Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB) that can provide up to 95 percent of their standard wages, some 1,500 Temporary Part Time (TPT) workers at the facility are only eligible for state unemployment

benefits.

While doing nothing to defend the jobs of autoworkers, the UAW in a statement Thursday praised President Donald Trump and said that the union wanted to work with him to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement. UAW President Dennis Williams also said that the union plans to resurrect its nationalist “Buy American” campaign. “We’re seeing a trend in this country—the boycott may be coming back,” adding that the “Buy American” push is gaining steam for the first time in “many, many years.”

This has nothing to do with defending jobs. Instead it is a ploy aimed at diverting the justified anger of workers over layoffs against their brother workers overseas just as the UAW did in the 1970s and 1980s as it was collaborating with the auto bosses in the destruction of workers’ jobs and living standards. The racism and anti-Asian chauvinism promoted by the UAW reached such a pitch that it led to the 1982 beating death of 27-year-old Chinese-American Vincent Chin by a Chrysler manager and his laid-off son.

Not only is the “Buy American” slogan reactionary, it is also absurd. Given the globally integrated nature of capitalist production, every vehicle produced, whether assembled in America or overseas, is the product of the coordinated efforts of workers in many different countries.

A GM Detroit Hamtramck worker contacted by the WSWWS said that despite her 34 years at the plant, the job cuts felt “scary.”

A worker on second shift said, “We just hear bits and pieces. People are still quitting and they have temporary workers filling in for those jobs.”

Another worker described a situation of near chaos with the company firing some workers while others quit in anticipation of being laid off. “We are so short-handed they are having people stay over from day shift and working 12-16 hours a day.

“They are telling me I won’t be transferred. My only option is to sit back and hope to be recalled.

“It’s bogus. It is not fair. People come to work every day and do their jobs and then are treated like this.”

A second-shift worker who is slated to be laid off in March noted that temporary workers were not eligible to receive profit-sharing checks. “Union workers are getting \$12,000 but we’re not getting anything because we’re temps. Absolutely nothing. Give us \$1,000, or *something*! But no, they said we don’t get anything. But we helped them perform to get that.

“They [the UAW] told us they would help us go to school, which is all well and good. And while we’re going to school we can get unemployment up to two years. \$300 a week can help a little while you’re going to school, but a lot of these schools don’t help you get a job. So what are we supposed to do without SUB pay too?”

A skilled trades worker from the GM Tech Center in Warren, Michigan spoke to the *Autoworker Newsletter*. He said that at his facility management was bringing in a lot of subcontractors to do skilled trades work. He also said that it appeared that temporary workers at the tech center might be laid off to provide openings for full-time workers laid off at the Detroit Hamtramck facility.

“They are working them 10, 12, 14 hours a day. But GM brought in 80-90 temporary workers since last year, knowing they are going to use and get rid of these people. It’s a sticky situation because lots are losing their jobs.

“I feel for my brothers and sisters at the Detroit plant. The UAW doesn’t defend us. We have to get workers together to protect all our jobs.”

The cuts at GM will have an impact throughout that Detroit area, which over the decades has been decimated by the shutdown of the auto industry. While Detroit Democratic Mayor Michael Duggan loses no opportunity to boast about the supposed “comeback” of Detroit and the upscale development taking place in downtown Detroit, he has said nothing about the cutting of 1,300 jobs at GM.

Dan, a street maintenance worker for the City of Detroit who works near the GM Detroit-Hamtramck plant, spoke to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “My thought is that here they are having these layoffs at the same time they are talking about investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the city. I don’t understand it. It’s also affecting people in Lansing—my friend works at GM in Lansing—and 800 people are losing their jobs out there.

“I know it’s a business. But they need to be more responsible for the lives they disrupt with this hiring and firing. These workers gave up their livelihoods to work at GM, and now they are being laid off.”

He said that workers employed by the city of Detroit face a management no less ruthless than that at GM. “We took a 10 percent pay cut,” he said, referring to the 2013-14 Detroit bankruptcy. “Now most of us are living paycheck to paycheck. We are making about \$2-\$3 an hour less than at comparable jobs at other cities.

“The city has these rehabbed houses that they are offering, but we can’t afford to take advantage of it. Nothing is affordable for us, not even our insurance. People are losing their houses and hiding their cars to keep them from being repossessed.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact