

US autoworkers discuss Ford job cuts, Washington political crisis

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Autoworkers in the United States received a new jolt this week with the announcement of thousands of job cuts by Ford targeting white-collar workers. The cutbacks are only the most recent job cut announcements impacting the autoworkers and come amidst signs that the seven-year boom in auto sales is slowing.

Wall Street is meanwhile braying for higher profit margins by Ford and the other US-based automakers, complaining that the record, multibillion-dollar profits of the car companies over the last seven years are not sufficient to meet investor expectations. Of course, never mentioned is where those profits must come from, which is the sweat and blood of autoworkers.

On Monday, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Ford could cut up to 10 percent of its workforce worldwide, which would translate into 20,000 jobs. The company has said it plans to slash some \$3 billion in costs in 2017.

The company has some 30,000 white-collar workers in the US alone, so the cuts could impact 3,000 workers. On Wednesday, the company said it is immediately targeting 1,400 salaried positions in North America, with the cuts to be implemented primarily through early retirements and buyouts.

The job cut announcement came just days after the *Journal* reported that investors had criticized the “pathetic” performance of Ford stock. Wall Street investors largely ignored the Ford job cut announcement. Stock prices fell for Ford and other automakers amid the general 373-point selloff Wednesday over concerns that the political crisis in Washington could derail Trump’s plans for a massive corporate tax cut.

Since 2014 the markets have punished Ford stock for failing to meet Wall Street expectations, despite steady

profits for the past seven years, including \$1.6 billion in the first quarter of 2017.

The cuts once again expose the phony claims of the Trump administration and the news media about the booming US economy and supposed “full employment.” The billionaire president has appointed both Ford CEO Mark Fields and GM top executive Mary Barra to economic advisory boards and both companies, along with the United Auto Workers union, have embraced Trump’s reactionary “Buy American, Hire American” campaign to expand production in the US at the expense of workers and plants in Mexico and other countries.

The *Journal* singled out the UAW for facilitating a new wave of layoffs by expanding the number of disposable temporary workers. “GM and Ford are making cuts to their US workforces that could far outpace the job commitments made in recent months amid political pressure. Armed with union contracts that were reworked a decade ago, domestic car companies can respond more rapidly to investor concerns about the bottom line.”

Workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* expressed solidarity with workers at Ford and anger over the insecurity they face with the ever-present threat of layoffs. Several also spoke about the crisis in Washington and the disconnect between the false picture of life in America promoted by the political establishment and the realities facing ordinary workers.

Martha, a worker with six years at the Ford Chicago Assembly plant, reacted to the Ford job cuts. “They just want more profits for themselves,” she exclaimed.

She said rather than hire more full-time workers at her plant, the company, in collaboration with the UAW, was expanding the use of temporary and part-time

workers as sanctioned by the sellout, 2015 national contract.

“They just told our temporary part-time workers (TPT) they will be working 40 hours a week until September, but will not be made full-time. Instead they are making them what they call special part-time (SPT) and will then convert them back to TPTs in September.

“It is the first time they have ever done this. They waited to do this so they didn’t have to pay them the special \$1,500 “inflation” bonus we get in June. You have to be working two weeks before May 15 as a 40-hour employee to qualify.”

The ongoing threat to auto jobs is feeding into the growing sense of insecurity and anxiety among workers, who feel the ground being pulled from under their feet. It comes amid the expansion of US wars in the Middle East, anti-immigrant raids and the passage of a draconian health care bill by the US House of Representatives targeting Medicaid, the government-sponsored health care plan for low-income households.

In April, GM indicated that it was also considering cuts to its white-collar workforce. Earlier this year, GM announced thousands of permanent hourly worker job cuts at its Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant as well as three plants in Michigan, including the Delta Township plant, Lansing Grand River and the Detroit-Hamtramck facility.

Barry, a GM retiree from the Delta Township Plant outside of Lansing, Michigan said, “They just laid off 600 two days ago from the plant here. They told them they would be brought back by the first of the year, but I don’t believe they will ever be brought back.

“The Grand River plant is not doing well either. You drive by the lot and it is full of Buicks and Camaros.

“There have been record numbers of cars sold, but they can’t maintain that. They are going to be starting some real cutbacks. It is boom and bust.

“It used to be that if the company made a profit, you got a raise. Now they are making huge profits, but we didn’t get back cost of living, the retirees didn’t get a bump in pensions and they hit us for more co-pays.”

He noted the disconnect between the political debate in Washington and the lives of ordinary working people.

“My mother lives in Flint. The whole block is like a war zone. She has a nice, well-maintained house, but she can’t sell it, even for \$10,000 because of the water

crisis. That is just a fraction of what she paid for it. It is a sad situation for someone who has worked all their lives.”

He added, “Trump is fascistic, glorifying the state, it is highly disturbing.

“It is obvious he wants to take us into war. If Congress were to pass a law requiring the US to take in the refugees from the countries it bombs, I don’t think we would be so quick to go to war.”

Martha said the ongoing political warfare in Washington over the Trump administration was anxiety provoking and confusing given the increasingly difficult situation that workers confront in their daily lives. “It is a mess with the economy. I don’t understand; it is so chaotic.

“It seems it’s all about the money. They could care less about what the low man is fighting for.”

A Fiat Chrysler worker, now at Warren Truck outside Detroit, who wished to remain anonymous, told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that she had been laid off for six months from the nearby Sterling Heights Assembly plant before being recalled.

“I personally know the situation is serious. I understand what those workers at Ford are going through.

“We lost our supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB) and some had to get jobs elsewhere. I personally did not get SUB pay until the end. It was a big mess.”

The Fiat Chrysler worker spoke about the sellout contract the UAW rammed through in 2015 over mass opposition. “I think the contract was BS. They had it so they could have temps working and we were in the street. We got a raise, but they ended up laying us off. At the same time, you had TPTs working 60 hours.

“They had people with three years’ seniority who were laid off and some people with two years were still working. I was placed first at Warren Stamping and I was just placed at Warren Truck in March.”



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