

Chicago Ford workers speak out against treatment of temporary part-timers

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As the class struggle continues to expand—with strikes by teachers in Oklahoma, rail and air workers walking out in France, university lecturers striking in the United Kingdom—autoworkers in the US are expressing growing opposition to their abysmal working conditions, particularly those faced by young temporary part-time (TPT) workers.

TPTs, who have essentially no job security and can be fired at will, suffer under some of the worst work rules and harassment, as exemplified in the case of Jacoby Hennings, the 21-year-old TPT who held jobs simultaneously at two auto plants in Michigan and allegedly killed himself last fall.

TPTs must still pay dues to the United Auto Workers union and can labor for years without reaching full-time employment. Further, the percentage of TPTs employed by the Detroit-based auto companies was significantly expanded in the 2015 sellout contract backed by the UAW.

To add insult to injury, those TPTs who are lucky enough to be converted to “in-progression” (the UAW-Big Three’s rebranded term for second-tier) often find their new positions to be little improved, or with significant strings attached.

Further, TPTs converted to full-time status must take a huge wage cut, going from approximately \$23 an hour to the entry-level in-progression wage of roughly \$17 an hour.

At Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant, UAW Local 551 recently trumpeted claims that over 200 TPTs would be converted to full-time, stating in a Facebook post, “After having conversations with UAW VP Jimmy Settles & UAW FORD this week at sub council, our chairman would like to announce that our plant will be converting 182 tpters and a [sic] ADDITIONAL 42 which brings our total to 224 TPTS being converted to

In-Progression at Cap!! This is awesome news for the morale of our members!!! Congratulations!!!”

However, workers who spoke with reporters for the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* over the weekend raised major questions over the UAW’s claims, and decried the conditions facing both TPT workers and others at the plant.

“They put them on a 90-day probation period for in-progression,” said one second tier worker, “And I don’t understand that, when almost all of them have already been here for two years. And because they were TPTs, the 90 days are ‘working days,’ which means vacations and holidays don’t count. So their new seniority day isn’t until June.

“Our contract is coming up for us next year, and I feel they’re using this as a ploy. It’s not fair, because they’re making these guys do all the hard work that those with more seniority don’t want to do.”

He continued, “As a TPT, you’re threatened, because if you do anything wrong, you’re about to be out the door, when all you’re trying to do is feed your family. And the union rep is like, ‘We don’t care until you become in-progression.’ Now how does that sound? It doesn’t make sense to me.”

The worker said that the UAW often acts as enforcers for Ford management, stating, “The advice they give to TPTs—it’s not really advice, it’s more like warnings. ‘Don’t lose your job, don’t screw up, we can’t help you.’”

“There’s that favoritism that goes on. You try to explain to the union that the supervisors have favoritism, but the union also has favoritism! When all we want is for someone to represent us.”

Another second-tier worker with six years at the plant said there were supposed to have been over 200 TPTs converted to full-time at CAP, “but since a plant closed

in Detroit, they gave those employees a chance to transfer over here first. But they only gave them a two-day window! They weren't giving them a week or two weeks to figure it out."

The worker noted that TPTs can be kept in temporary status for years, and that Ford had a direct economic interest in doing so: "I'm going to be honest with you, they held them so long before converting them over because they are the only people that *cannot* miss a day.

"We have 4,000 employees between three shifts here," and many qualify for or have been out on medical leave, he continued. But the TPTs don't qualify for Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave, so "they are guaranteed to come to work if they want to keep their job."

"They can say there's been an economic recovery, but I'm still broke," he added. "I started at Ford six years ago, worked my way up from \$15 an hour to \$26 an hour, but I'm still broke. It still takes two people to manage a household."

Anthony, a skilled trades worker, told the WSWS. "I'm against the tier system. The TPTs are doing the same work as everyone else, so they should be making the same amount of money." Referring to the restructuring of the auto industry under Obama during the 2009 Wall Street bailout, the worker said, "The auto companies are all bailed out now and they're all making money, so they should lose the tier system."

WSWS reporters also spoke to autoworkers about the upcoming meeting "Organizing Resistance to Internet Censorship" on April 15 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. A number of workers strongly expressed support for the defense of the freedom of Internet speech, while others spoke out on their own experiences with censorship. One, a veteran of the US Army, said, "I was in the Army. I've been censored my whole life."

Another worker who asked not to be named denounced the censorship on the part of the union and company management. "I got in trouble here for speaking about my opinions on public radio during the 2015 negotiations."

David, a second-tier worker, said of UAW, "I don't like the union. It takes your money and gives nothing in return, like an insurance company."



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