

Anger builds against UAW over layoffs, outsourcing at GM Lordstown, Ohio plant

Tim Rivers
30 April 2018

Anger is spreading among rank-and-file workers in the Mahoning Valley, Ohio, as the scheme by the United Auto Workers-General Motors to replace high-seniority workers at GM's Lordstown plant with low-paid temporary workers becomes more broadly understood.

An article on the rotten agreement, which was posted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and its *Autoworker Newsletter* last Tuesday, has been read and shared by an estimated 60,000 workers, including autoworkers, Teamsters truck drivers, steelworkers, grocery workers and retirees.

GM has acknowledged that its subsidiary, Lordstown GM Subsystems, was hiring low-paid temporary workers only days after GM announced the elimination of an entire shift and 1,500 jobs at the giant Lordstown assembly plant, located halfway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. GM outsourced the jobs to its low-wage subsidiary under a framework "Competitive Operating Agreement" signed by the UAW behind the backs of workers.

The sharing of the article has sparked a groundswell of opposition among rank-and-file workers. In 2015, autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford rebelled against the UAW, which was only able to ram through sellout contracts through lies, threats and ballot stuffing. There is a growing mood of militancy among 140,000 autoworkers, who face the expiration of their contracts in September 2019, and widespread hostility to the UAW, which is engulfed in corruption scandal involving bribes paid to union negotiators to sign company-friendly contracts.

A worker at Comprehensive Logistics, which does preassembly for the Lordstown GM plant told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, "Before the third shift at GM shut down last year, we had 500 workers on

three shifts. When that shift was cut, our plant was cut to 325 people. Now this June another 150 are going to lose their jobs.

"We have the steelworkers union," he said, "but it is no different from the UAW. They forced through a pro-company contract last year when we all opposed it. The union is not for us. Trust in the unions is gone."

As with many workers the *WSWS* spoke to, the parts worker is looking for a way to fight back. "Something has to happen now," he said to sum up the situation. "Building new organizations, beginning with rank-and-file committees is about the only thing that is left."

The Competitive Operating Agreement or COA, under which the current attacks are taking place was agreed to, accepted and signed off on by all the relevant representatives of the union. UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada defended the deal, saying it was the only way to prevent the plant from closing. The UAW has peddled the same lies to justify decades of concessions, which did nothing to stop the destruction of nearly one million auto jobs since 1979.

Disgust with the UAW is widespread. "I spoke to my local union two days ago," said a Lordstown worker who may lose her job. "They said they did not agree to this," she continued. "But I think they are all a bunch of liars. I don't believe any of them."

The developments at Lordstown only provide further proof that the UAW is not a workers' organization, but a labor contractor, whose job is to enforce poverty-level wages on workers and do whatever it can to suppress opposition.

A fight against the destruction of jobs and poverty-level wages must be carried out. Rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the union, must be organized to prepare and coordinate opposition. This should include common action by GM and GM

Subsystems workers, and workers throughout the area, to defend all jobs. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges all workers to contact us to help organize this fight.

It is particularly urgent that autoworkers join their struggle with teachers throughout the US and internationally. A series of strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and now Arizona has demonstrated the role of the teacher unions in isolating and shutting down strikes, when they cannot prevent them altogether. That is, they are playing the same role as the UAW, attempting to isolate teachers and impose defeats.

The decades-long suppression of opposition by the UAW has led to massive increases in corporate profits. GM reported record-matching pretax profits of \$12.8 billion in 2017 and is accelerating the destruction of jobs internationally, including in Europe, South Korea and other regions. At the same, the company is using the windfall of cash it has gotten due to Trump's tax cuts to further enrich its top investors and corporate executives, including CEO Mary Barra who pocketed \$22 million last year.

"The whole situation makes me mad," added another worker with high seniority. "My boyfriend has worked there 25 years. Now they want him to train the part-timers that are going to take his job. They will bump him off material handling, and he will have to go back on the line."

"That is a slap in the face," she continued. "They want to force these guys with 25 and 30 years seniority out of the plant. Now they want to create nothing but sweatshops in the auto plants."

"Everyone I know out there, their bodies are destroyed. My mother has mesothelioma (an asbestos-related cancer) from working there. Once upon a time, they had solidarity in the fight against the company. Today the union is working with the company to humiliate workers and force them into retirement."

"The whole community is grief stricken: they are losing 150 jobs at one place and 85 at another. The company is trying to cheat you any way they can, and the union is helping them do it. They are rushing people to turn in their pension paperwork."

"My friend works at a trucking company under Teamsters local 377. They are slowing down. They are going to be laying off, and their pension may be gone. Our Giant Eagle [grocery store] used to be open 24

hours forever. Now they are closing at 11 PM. The restaurant Eat'n Park used to be open around the clock, and they are not open late any more. This is not just hurting autoworkers. This is hurting everybody."

A retiree who just signed up for the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* said, "I would really like to know what is going on. I don't think what they are doing is right. They want to start hiring temporary workers at \$15.00 an hour."

"My son was part of the third shift that got laid off last year. They said they would hire him back, but nobody has called. As a temp he did not get bonuses, did not get equal pay and didn't really have any right to say anything."

"These people have homes and children. They have all kinds of bills."

"At one time that plant employed 10,000 people. My husband hired in when they opened the place in 1964. In the strikes in 1970 and 1974, nobody had the nerve to walk across that picket line. Now the company can do anything they want. I don't know if I'm going to lose my medical, my pension. We have no guarantee for anything."

"This is going to effect the whole Mahoning Valley. Magna Seating, a division of Lear Corporation, is going to cut 85 jobs. Every company is going to be losing so many people."

"GM is trying to force the old-timers out. When the second shift goes down, a lot of them are going to have to go back on the line. There is no way they can do that line job."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact