"The union and the company are working together"

Autoworkers denounce GM Lordstown layoffs, UAW collaboration

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There is widespread anger among workers at the General Motors Lordstown Assembly Complex as well as in the broader community over the impending layoff of 1,500 workers at the factory being carried out with the connivance of the United Auto Workers.

GM is laying off an entire shift in June at the plant that builds the Chevrolet Cruze compact car. At the same time, under terms of a "Competitive Operating Agreement" signed by the UAW, GM is hiring low-paid workers at its subsidiary GM Subsystems to work in the plant to replace jobs done by veteran workers. The announcement sparked outrage among workers at the Lordstown plant, who recognize it as a move by management and the UAW to drive out better-paid senior workers and bring in lower paid temporary workers with few if any rights.

An article posted by the *World Socialist Web Site* exposing the agreement has been read by tens of thousands of workers.

Workers warmly greeted a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team that visited the Lordstown plant on Tuesday. Many workers were eager to take the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* and discuss the layoffs. Workers expressed disgust with the UAW, saying they had been lied to and kept in the dark about the layoffs.

"The union and the company are working together," said one worker. "You have a conflict of interest. We all know it's not right. I've got 34 years and I can't even hold the second shift. That's because of the Delphi transfer. (Workers who had worked at the former GM Delphi division lost their seniority along with other benefits when they transferred to GM.) That's another thing our union really screwed us out of that deal coming over here. There are a lot of things we lost."

He continued, "Stand up here on the sidewalk, everyone needs to see this. My faith in the UAW International is lacking to say the least."

Another worker said, "I worked here for 20 years and I'm just on the bubble. I'll just miss getting laid off. I'm one of the last of the Mohicans."

The UAW is desperately trying to deflect workers' anger, falsely claiming the union executives did not realize the agreement they signed with GM would allow the company to bring in lower paid subcontract workers while senior employees were on layoff. In another diversion, UAW Local 1112 officials filed a protest over management's decision to bring in 800 fenders from Mexico due to the breakdown of a stamping press. The breakdown caused the shutdown of the second shift at the East Plant on Friday.

The protest is thoroughly reactionary and is in line with the continuing attempts by the UAW to scapegoat workers in Mexico and other countries for the destruction of jobs caused as a result of the workings of capitalist system. For decades, the UAW has promoted "Buy American" chauvinism to justify its collaboration with the auto bosses and block the international unification of autoworkers against the global corporations.

In fact, the UAW supports the decision by GM to axe hundreds of jobs and bring in low-wage replacement workers, insisting that workers bear whatever sacrifices are necessary to make GM and other US automakers "competitive," i.e., profitable.

Lordstown workers contacted by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reported that, as part of the deal signed by the UAW, GM plans to bring back laid off

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workers as subcontractors to take over logistics jobs currently performed by senior GM workers earning standard pay and benefits. To add insult to injury, senior workers being replaced must train their replacements. These older workers will be forced back onto assembly line jobs with the aim of driving them out of the plant.

Tina, a 23-year veteran, told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, "They want workers making $30 an hour or more out the door. They are bringing in people making $15 an hour. After they take out union dues, medical deductions and 401k, they will be making minimum wage.

"My daughter's boyfriend has been a temporary worker for years. Nothing is protecting them. The company does what it wants with the union. I am angry at the CEOs and the officials in the union. They don't get cut. If we go down to $15 they will still be making their full pay."

GM workers should reject the claim that there is no alternative to layoffs and launch a fight for the defense of all jobs. Workers are not responsible for the vagaries of the capitalist market and should not be made to bear the cost.

Instead of layoffs, workers should demand the introduction of a 30-hour workweek at no loss in pay. UAW officials and management will claim this is impossible, but the resources exist in abundance to provide a job and a decent income to every worker. The latest job cuts take place under conditions where GM is raking in massive profits, $2.6 billion in the first quarter of 2018 alone. After collecting a windfall of cash from Trump's corporate tax cuts, GM has awarded massive dividends to stockholders and carried out a multi-billion-dollar stock buyback to further drive up the value of the shares held by its corporate executives and richest investors.

To carry out this fight requires a rebellion against the pro-company UAW. Workers should elect rank-and-file committees to unite all workers—first- and second-tier, temporary part-time and contract workers—to organize a struggle against the layoffs and defend the right of all workers to secure and good paying jobs. These committees should reach out to autoworkers at Ford, Fiat Chrysler and other autoworkers throughout the US, as well as other sections of workers, including teachers, who have launched a rebellion in defense of education and against their own unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. Workers must reject the nationalist poison spewed out by the UAW and link arms with their brother workers overseas in a common struggle against the transnational corporations.

Such as fight will win enormous popular support. The GM layoffs will have a devastating effect, not just on Lordstown workers, but on workers in the entire surrounding Mahoning Valley, which has suffered decades of deindustrialization that has impoverished large sections of the working class. Already several auto parts suppliers in area have announced impending layoffs, including Source Providers, 150 jobs, and Lordstown Seating Systems, 83 jobs.

WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters spoke to workers in the city of Warren adjacent to Lordstown about the layoffs. Warren has a median income of just over $30,000 annually compared to $52,000 for the state of Ohio. Nearby Youngstown, once a steelmaking center, had a poverty rate in 2017 of 38 percent according to the US Census Bureau.

Many were shocked when they heard that the UAW had signed off not only on the job cuts, but the hiring of low-wage replacements. "They're supposed to be representing them," one worker said. "If I was them, I would go on strike."

Workers also spoke about the depressed economic conditions in the area. "GM is one of the only main employers in the area," a mother told WSWS reporters at a local grocery. "It's a poor neighborhood, there's not much out here." She told reporters her husband works odd jobs to support their family.

"Unemployment, housing, it's just bad here in Ohio," a retired truck driver said. "There's nowhere to prosper, and companies are leaving Warren. I don't see any improvement here."

Workers interested in carrying out this fight should contact the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter for support and assistance in the fight to build rank-and-file committees.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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