

Lordstown GM worker speaks out against pending layoffs

“Workers all over the world need to unite together”

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With 1,500 autoworkers facing a June 22 layoff date at the General Motors assembly plant in Lordstown, Ohio, anger is continuing to build against a sweetheart deal signed behind the backs of workers by the United Auto Workers to bring in low paid contract workers to take over some of the jobs.

The temporary employees are being hired through a GM subsidiary, GM Subsystems LCC. They will be paid only a fraction of what current workers make, with only minimal benefits.

As part of the deal, GM has agreed that the temporary workers would pay dues to the UAW but have no rights.

“They want to cut everyone’s wages,” said a long time GM employee who is one of the 1,500 facing layoff in comments to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. She asked to remain anonymous out of fear of retaliation by GM and the UAW.

Under the terms of the UAW-GM deal, the company can replace all non-assembly line workers with temporary employees from GM Subsystems. Older workers with greater seniority will be able to replace workers with lesser seniority on the assembly line, but many of them are no longer able to keep up with the brutal line speed.

Needless to say the layoff of the Lordstown GM workers is not a topic of discussion at the ongoing UAW convention in Detroit. The UAW has in fact endorsed the layoffs on the grounds that they are made necessary by “market conditions.”

“This is their way of telling the older guys they want them out. They have been trying to cut the wages for a long time. People who have the time can bid for jobs off the line, like driving a forklift or something. Well now they have to go back on the line if they want to keep working, so many of them will just quit.

“They want to get all the traditional people on the line,

they want them to work the line, they don’t want them to get the easy jobs, they want to give those to the lower paid employees. Sooner or later they want to cut everybody’s wages.”

Last year, GM laid off the third shift at the plant and many of those workers have not been able to find any other work.

“Now the company is bringing in the temporaries, many of them are people who already worked on the line and were laid off when they got rid of the third shift and they will be doing the same job, be members of the union, but only get paid 15 bucks an hour and have much less in benefits.

“They are not saying how long the layoff is going to be. Some people are saying it could be a year or a year and a half. It has affected a lot of people, a lot of people. It is sad.

“I will get unemployment and SUB pay. It’s not the full amount, but it is pretty close.

Under terms of the UAW agreement some laid-off GM workers are eligible for supplementary unemployment benefits (SUB) pay that makes up a portion of the difference between their regular wages and regular unemployment benefits.

Speaking on the conditions faced by the younger workers and those that were temporaries at the Lordstown plant, the worker explained, “There are younger workers who will only get maybe one or two weeks of SUB pay. Some of them were hired by the company in 2008 as temp workers before getting hired in 2012. However, they have already been laid off a lot and might only have one or two weeks of SUB pay left.

“Those are rights that we fought for and now they are giving all that away. With me, they make profits off of me for years. When those people were temps they couldn’t

miss a day, they didn't get medical, nothing. To me that is slave labor to be working that hard and not get anything. Working next to me and to be treated like that is just wrong. And sometimes the union says that 'they are nobody.' The heck they aren't, they pay union dues just like me."

Many of the workers getting laid off have over 20 years with GM, but because much of that time was spent working in GM's parts division, that time does not count toward seniority at the Lordstown plant.

Thousands of GM workers worked at several Packard Electric plants in nearby Warren Ohio. In 1999 Packard became part of GM's major parts supplier Delphi. In 2005, Delphi declared bankruptcy and with the agreement of the UAW and its other unions, cut workers wages, benefits and pensions.

The worker continued: "They froze our pensions. They cut our wages, our benefits and everything. It hurt a lot of families. You either had to take retirement or take this buyout. I stayed on because they needed so many people, and that is when our wages got cut and our pensions got frozen. After a while, I got a chance to go over to GM and I took it.

"There were people who had more time than me and they were put on the line. Skilled trades were not allowed to be skilled trades, they had to be put on the line. They lost their skilled trades [classification], but they wanted to be transferred over, because they wanted back what we had lost in pay.

"When we did go over, we lost our buy-down money, which is over three years of time. We got our wage back, we got better benefits, but we lost the time on the floor. People who were hired in, or people who were UAW members or family members, were brought in before they brought us over so they would have more time on the floor.

"They were going to make sure we weren't going to get good jobs, that we were going to get bad jobs, and that is what we got."

Remarking on the line speed, the worker said "I think we have about 30 seconds. They say it depends upon your job, but in my section it is about 30 seconds. It is constant all night long, unless there is a break somewhere, which don't happen too often, or they are having problems in paint or fab, that line just keeps on moving.

"It all depends if they get that number. That is what kills me, they keep pushing for that number, yet a shift is getting laid off again. Ever since they took third shift off they are having us work over, and now they are getting rid

of another shift. Me, I yell, 'you want to get rid of a shift yet you need these damn cars.'

"Fear of unemployment is why people are willing to take the jobs at \$15 an hour. Some of these people have lived here all of their lives and they don't want to move. And I don't blame them, I wouldn't want to move either. I wouldn't want to transfer to Michigan, Tennessee or Texas. I don't know if I'm going to be able to find a job. I wouldn't want to get into McDonalds, I wouldn't want to get into Walmart.

"And another thing is the benefits. The temporary employees, they have a couple of thousand in deductibles."

Speaking of the plight of low-wage workers overseas she added, "People need work to provide. I don't think they should make 50 cents a day. I see the jobs that I've done over the years and I can't imagine what it has done to their bodies. That is how I feel. I mean, these companies are making all these profits and the people aren't getting anything. It doesn't matter where you live, you deserve to have a decent living.

"Workers all over the world need to unite together against the greed of the companies.

"What do I care if I buy a Toyota or anything like that, because guess what? Parts are coming from all over the country. So General Motors says if you drive a Chrysler or whatever, you don't park beyond this point. What makes the difference? That Chevy that I drive has parts from all over the country. It's not because we don't assemble it here. Not all General Motors vehicles are assembled here, some are built in Canada and wherever.

"We should all start standing up and fighting. Like they say, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and we have got to unite to stop it."



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