

“They’re getting more money and we’re losing workers”

In wake of UAW convention, Lordstown GM workers speak out on layoffs

A WSWS reporting team
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Autoworkers at the General Motors Lordstown assembly plant are venting their disgust and anger at both the company and the United Auto Workers as the shutdown of the second shift approaches next Friday.

Some 1,500 jobs are being impacted by the layoffs at the massive assembly plant located near Youngstown, Ohio, that makes the Chevy Cruze. Sales of the Cruze have fallen as GM has eliminated almost all sales incentives on their small car line in favor of their larger pickup trucks and SUVs, which generate larger profits.

GM has been reporting record profits for the past several years and is expected to make billions in a massive windfall from the giant corporate tax cuts granted by the Trump administration and approved by Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

Just as GM announced the layoffs in Lordstown, the UAW signed a COA, or Competitive Operating Agreement, with GM that will allow the company to bring in a GM subsidiary, GM Subsystems, to fill many jobs previously done by senior workers. Under terms of the UAW-GM deal, workers at GM Subsystems will be paid a fraction of what traditional autoworkers make, with no benefits.

In return, GM has agreed to withhold union dues from these temporary workers and give them to the UAW, which just approved a 31 percent pay raise for top officers at the union’s constitutional convention this week in Detroit. The gathering of union operatives was held under the shadow of a widening corruption scandal that implicates the whole organization in a scheme to siphon off money from UAW-Chrysler National Training Center.

“That is no good. That is BS,” said a worker with 30 years’ service reacting to the impending layoffs. “I’ll go to first shift, but a lot of people will lose their jobs for now. That is not right to let people get laid off and then

bring in other people for less money.”

The UAW has not organized any fight to defend jobs, even as slowing car sales have led to layoffs. Ford recently announced that it is ending passenger car production in the US and Fiat Chrysler has already ceased car production to focus on more profitable light trucks and SUVs.

The June 22 layoffs will eliminate about half of the remaining jobs at the plant. GM eliminated the third shift at Lordstown in January 2017. There are reports that some laid-off Lordstown GM workers are being hired back under GM Subsystems at lower pay.

To divert workers’ anger the UAW is continuing to promote reactionary nationalism, lining up behind the Trump administration’s announced trade war measures, including a threatened tariff on auto imports.

Most workers greeted the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters with interest. When handed a newsletter, one worker responded, “I read that last one, it was pretty good.”

Robert Polansky, a paint department team leader with 52 years at the Lordstown plant, denounced the replacement of full-time workers with contractors. “That’s not right. If we have laid off people, they should be here,” he said. “You don’t bring in temp people to replace people who are going to be out on the street. That’s wrong. That’s just totally wrong.”

Asked about the role of the UAW, Robert responded, “You know what we don’t like right now? How come they gave themselves a 31 percent raise when all we got was 4 percent? That’s what everybody’s talking about. They’re starting to sound like Washington D.C. and senators and congressmen voting themselves raises whenever they want one. There’s something wrong at the top here.”

Robert agreed that the UAW acts as an arm of management. “Yes, I agree 100 percent with that,” he said. “Basically, what the International does is that it has taken all the power away from our local people. If you talk to our local committeemen, they can’t do this, they can’t do that, because they signed a piece of paper that says up in Detroit that says so.”

“I hope you guys can do something, shine a light on this,” Robert said. “We don’t need the United Auto Workers in there, we need a union, somebody who will protect us.”

The UAW reports that 595 Lordstown workers opted to take early retirement or a buyout offered by management in advance of the layoffs. This is in line with GM’s drive to replace higher paid senior workers with tier-two workers and contract workers. The exact impact of the attrition on the total number of layoffs has not yet been determined.

James Mayberry is getting laid off. “It sucks, when my dad grew up, the union had power, they did what they were supposed to do.” He said, “I took the buyout. I’ve been here since 2012. This place caused me a stroke, I had a stroke when I started here, driving a tugger. I come back for six months, they called me back in March and going to lay me off in June.”

Ron gave the Lordstown GM auto assembly plant 18 years. He is in AGV (Automated Guided Vehicle), a cart for moving materials around the plant.

Asked how he felt about the temporary workers being brought in, Ron said, “I’m not too happy about it ... the permanents are losing their jobs,” referring to the layoff coming next week.

The *Autoworker Newsletter* asked Ron if he’d been following the convention.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m not too happy about them getting raises.” Ron added, “even those delegates that we voted for ... it’s like ... they’re not doing anything. They’re just jumping on the bandwagon.

“They’re getting more money and we’re losing workers,” he said. “A lot of people are going to have to leave their families, some are taking them. It is hard to uproot your family when you don’t know what is going to happen.”

Mark Piroch, a team leader with 18 years at the plant, will be forced to return to the assembly line. “They’re going to put me back on the line,” he said. “Pretty much all of the team leaders on second shift have to go back on the line.”

Mark denounced the UAW, “Those union leaders

giving themselves raises of \$40,000 a year? It’s messed up.”

Speaking on the UAW’s decision to allow management to replace full-time workers with outside contractors, Mark continued, “I disagree with that. The International is selling us down the river. That’s how I feel about it.”

Mark agreed with a *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* reporter’s characterization of the UAW as part of management. “Since I started 18 years ago there has been a total change. You used to be able to fight. Now they [the company] get whatever they want. We’ve been giving concessions for years, and the International board give themselves \$40,000 raises and we’re getting thrown out on the street.”

Dennis, a first-tier headlight installer with 10 years at the plant, expressed disgust at the layoffs. “I’m laid off June 22,” he said. “I think it’s really messed up, man. We’re out here 10 years, busting our asses. I’m in therapy right now, working on my hip and both shoulders. I do what I can to stay here. I’m not going on sick leave and I had to suffer for the last month just so I can stay in the system for transfers. If you’re on sick leave, they look right over you.

“On that note, I don’t want to transfer. Nobody wants to transfer, but that seems like the only thing because I’m so low on the list. It’s messed up.

“A lot of people think you don’t work that hard here, but you do. I’ve worn out everything. Ten years and this is what they want to do to you? ‘You’re gone, a piece of meat. See you later.’ That’s what they do to you. I just dedicated 10 years of my life.”

Dennis explained that he would have had enough seniority to stay at the plant if the UAW did not allow the company to replace full-time workers with outside contractors. “I would have my job if they didn’t do that, because it’s so many people,” he said. “I looked at the numbers, and I would still have my job, even if they just went to the first shift. But since they outsourced that, there it goes. I’m out.”



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