

“If people on the shop floor had more power, things would be a whole lot better”

With UAW complicity, layoffs take effect at GM Lordstown Complex in Ohio

A WSWS reporting team
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Friday marked the last day on the job for hundreds of workers at the General Motors Lordstown Complex in Ohio with the elimination of the second shift at the giant plant. Some 1,500 jobs are being eliminated at the facility, with some workers taking buyouts or early retirement and many more left out on the street.

Emotions ran high as workers said their final farewells at the end of the shift. Many expressed anger at the United Auto Workers, which refused to lift a finger to oppose the layoffs. Just last week, delegates at the UAW Constitutional Convention in Detroit voted to give giant pay hikes to top union executives.

The job cuts will have a devastating impact in the Youngstown-Warren area of northeastern Ohio, a region that has already been hard hit by deindustrialization. Once a major steel producing area, Warren-Youngstown has seen a recent rise in opioid deaths amidst a chronically high unemployment rate.

Just days before the layoffs hit the Lordstown Complex, agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) carried out a raid and arrested 146 immigrants at a meatpacking plant in nearby Salem, Ohio. The sweep included heavily armed ICE and local police backed by helicopters. The escalating attacks on immigrants are part of an effort by the Trump administration to divert social anger over deteriorating conditions by scapegoating the most vulnerable layers in society.

A *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* reporting team visited the Lordstown Complex on Friday, the last day for the second shift. “The way things are going, I could see this plant closing,” said a

veteran Lordstown worker. “The handwriting is on the wall.”

Another worker said, “Nobody wants to care about us it seems like,” referring to the UAW. “Look what happened today!”

Workers who transferred to GM from the Delphi Automotive Packard Electric plants in the area face layoff, even though they have in some cases more than 20 years seniority. That time does not count toward seniority at the Lordstown plant.

Compounding worker anger, the UAW signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with GM earlier this year allowing the company to hire lower paid contract workers with GM Subsystems LLC to take jobs formerly held by plant workers. A similar agreement was signed at the Lake Orion plant outside of Detroit.

The WSWS team distributed a statement calling for the building of rank-and-file factory committees to unite all workers, full time, part time and contract labor, against the UAW-management conspiracy. It appealed to workers to reject the attempts to scapegoat immigrant workers and called for a united struggle in defense of jobs.

Ken, a Lordstown GM worker, stopped to speak with *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters. “I am definitely in sympathy with and support those affected. I am super frustrated with the way the union is going. You need to have a sense of community,” he said, referring to the way workers were being pitted against one another through the policies of the UAW.

“There is a huge amount of dishonesty,” he said

about both the UAW and management. “If people on the shop floor had more power, things would be a whole lot better.”

Ken noted that both the company and the UAW constantly raised the threat of shifting production to Mexico. “I am not blaming Mexican workers,” Ken added, “but there is a constant threat.”

Autoworker Newsletter reporters pointed out that the targeting of immigrants, as in the recent ICE raids, was aimed at dividing the working class. “I am all for uniting auto workers internationally,” Ken said.

“I am utterly opposed,” he said referring to the ICE raids. “With the drug cartels in Mexico, if I lived there I would be doing everything I could to get out. I don’t blame them.

“They are creating fear,” he said of the US authorities. “The claim that immigrants bring drugs and higher crime rates is just not true. They are some of the most law-abiding communities.”

After the plant shift change, WSWs reporters visited a working-class neighborhood in nearby Youngstown, located in Mahoning County, to gauge reaction to the GM layoffs. A report by Kids Count found that in 2016, 27.2 percent of children in Mahoning County were living in poverty. While there has been a growth of jobs, many are low income or involve irregular schedules that create childcare problems for families. A 2017 report by the Economic Innovation Group found that Youngstown was the most distressed city in America among small and mid-size cities.

Many workers said they personally knew people affected by the GM job cuts.

Leah, a childcare worker said, “The impact is apparent at the childcare center where I work. I know of five families that are impacted by the layoffs, one with eight children. Now the parents are without a job. I can see how much that family is struggling.

“I had a friend who was laid off at GM last year. She was called back in January, and now she is being laid off again. It is tough for everyone. Getting told you are losing your job is tough.”

Another worker, Carmen, employed at Taylor Steel in Warren, said the GM layoffs are, “going to affect the whole economy around here. I’m in the steel business. We basically cater to the auto industry.

“In this area, we need GM. We really do. They keep a lot of people employed. I feel sorry for the laid-off

workers. They get the buyout, but guess what? Say it’s a \$60,000 buyout. You’ll only get about \$40,000 after taxes. And then if you owe money on your car, they take that amount out first.

“People killed themselves the last time they had a buyout at Lordstown, several years ago. Say if you owe child support. If you took the buyout, they take the child support money out of the buyout money. So people thought they were getting all this money, but when they finally got it, it wasn’t enough. So this one worker owed child support, and he killed himself, because he had no money left after they took it out of his buyout. So what are you supposed to do? I hope they tell people before they sign to take the buyouts.

“My brother works at Packard [Electric], and they offered him a buyout. He chose to keep his job but had to take a pay cut. But he thought it was the best thing to do because he didn’t want to be out there looking for a job. Do you realize how many people are looking for jobs right now? It’s a terrible situation.”



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