"They want us divided. Workers need to unite everywhere"

In wake of Lordstown layoffs, UAW stokes anti-Mexican nationalism

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With General Motors Lordstown workers seething over the layoff of the second shift at the Ohio assembly plant on June 22, eliminating some 1,500 jobs, UAW officials are attempting to divert workers' anger with a nationalist outburst over GM's announced decision to build the new Chevrolet Blazer in Mexico.

The UAW did not lift a finger to oppose the layoffs at Lordstown, which is down to one shift from three in early 2017 and approximately 1,500 workers from 4,500 a year ago. Instead the UAW International and local union signed a secret memorandum of understanding with GM to permit the hiring of contract workers, at one half standard wages, to take jobs held by senior workers at the facility that builds the Chevy Cruze passenger car.

Lordstown workers contacted by the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter*reported that in the wake of the layoffs management was scheduling forced overtime for the remaining workers, again with no opposition from the union.

To channel anger away from the company and the union, the UAW has issued a series of statements denouncing the decision by GM to build the Blazer, redesigned as an SUV, at its plant in Ramos Arizpe in Mexico. GM said it made the decision two years ago when all US SUV plants were running at full capacity.

Newly installed UAW vice president for GM Terry Dittes called the decision "disappointing to UAW families." UAW Lordstown Local 1112 President Dave Green—a long-time enforcer of management's dictates—called the announcement by GM "a kick in the gut." Meanwhile, Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio issued a statement calling the move by GM "irresponsible."

These chauvinist declarations come in the midst of a fascistic anti-immigrant witch-hunt being conducted by the Trump administration, targeting primarily Mexican, workers, who are being denounced as "criminals" and "rapists." Just days before the Lordstown layoffs agents for the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raided a meatpacking plant just 18 miles from the Lordstown plant and arrested 146 workers, mainly natives of Guatemala.

The layoffs by the Detroit-based company exposed the lie that immigrant workers were the cause of low wages and unemployment. Instead GM's top executives and Wall Street backers, with the full-backing of the UAW, made the cold, calculated decision to throw thousands of workers into the streets to boost the company's profits. At the same time GM has squandered its multi-billion-dollar profits, bolstered by Trump's corporate tax cuts, on stock buybacks and dividend payments for its richest investors.

The Gestapo-like methods being deployed against immigrants are directed against the entire working class. The workplace raids and mass arrests in Ohio are a dress rehearsal for the type of state repression that will be unleashed against all workers, native born and immigrant, who fight to defend their jobs and livelihoods.

The role of the UAW is to divide American workers from their class brothers and sisters in Mexico and divert and block any fight against layoffs and intolerable conditions in the workplace.

The promotion by the UAW of its reactionary "Buy American" campaign and calls for import tariffs dovetails with the fascistic "America First" program of Trump. The UAW has strongly supported import tariffs on automobiles while remaining silent on Trump's attacks on immigrant workers.

The logic of the protectionist program of the UAW is the development of trade war, which like in the 1930s, would be the precursor of a shooting war between the

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major world powers. As far as protecting jobs, global automakers, including GM, have warned that a trade war would lead to major US job losses, with the price of a typical new vehicle in the US rising by $5,800.

Candy, a veteran Lordstown worker, took the buyout offered by GM rather than continue working under deteriorating plant environment. “I feel I was forced out,” she said. “It is like a sweatshop in there.” She added. “It is not just happening in auto,” she continued. “They are doing it everywhere, at UPS at Fedex, to teachers. I don’t know where it is going to end.”

Asked what she thought about the attempt by the UAW to pit Lordstown workers against workers in Mexico, Candy said, “When people say ‘Buy American’ I say there are parts coming in from other countries all over the world. They want us divided. I think workers need to unite everywhere.”

Workers at Lordstown were angered by a secret memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed earlier this year by the UAW permitting GM to hire contract workers from GM Subsystems LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of GM, to do material handling work formerly performed by regular GM employees. The GM Subsystems workers earn around $15 an hour, half the wages of tier one workers.

The MOU was signed by then UAW vice president for GM, Cindy Estrada, as well as Local 1112 leaders. After the deal became public it sparked such outrage that Estrada was forced to issue a lying apology, claiming the sellout deal was necessary to preserve jobs at Lordstown and the Lake Orion plant in suburban Detroit.

In the wake of the recent UAW Constitutional Convention newly installed UAW President Gary Jones transferred Estrada to the Chrysler department and brought in Dittes, the former Chrysler VP, to GM.

The effective demotion of Estrada takes place under conditions where her private charity is being scrutinized by federal investigators to determine if it served as a conduit for the illegal transfer of funds from joint UAW-management training centers. Three senior UAW officials with the Fiat Chrysler department have already been indicted for receiving illegal payments from management aimed at influencing negotiations and two have pleaded guilty. Investigators have labeled the UAW as a “co-conspirator” in the illegal scheme.

Mike, another veteran worker said, “It is ridiculous what is going on. All the contracts the union signed should be null and void. The UAW (executives) just gave themselves a 31 percent pay raise and they want to bring material handlers into our plant making just $15 an hour.

“They treat us like s—t. We are not machines. What workers fought for in the 1930s the UAW has wiped away with a pen. Why would anyone want to work at this place rather than Lowe’s, Home Depot or Best Buy?”

About 600 workers at the Lordstown plant took buyout offers, giving up their recall rights and barring them from future employment with GM. Other workers reportedly transferred to the GM plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee, where they will start with zero plant wide seniority, meaning they will be the first to be laid off in case of future job cuts.

Management is conducting a systematic campaign, with the complicity of the UAW, to purge higher paid tier-one workers and replace them with tier two workers or contract workers to slash costs.

“They have bought us out and transferred workers to Spring Hill, so they can bring in more people at half wages,” Candy said. “Some of those who took the buyout were younger. They had enough. The conditions are horrible.”

She noted that the UAW had overseen the decimation of jobs at Lordstown all the while promoting its reactionary nationalism.

“When I started working here we had 14,000 workers at the two plants. They outsourced a lot of that work to other companies, like CLI, [Comprehensive Logistics] that pay people $10 or $12 an hour. Now they are going to bring them into the plant and lease them space. Now they have shuttle drivers who transport parts for $25 a round trip. They will get rid of our dock drivers. I believe they will eventually have the plant down to just 400 GM people.

Asked about the role of the UAW, Candy said, “I believe they are bought and paid for. They are not working for the people. All they are doing is getting lower costs, they don’t care about the conditions.

“I have seen this coming for years. You have no say. They can put you anywhere they want at any time. It is not safe. Some people can’t even do the jobs they are assigned, but management doesn’t want to hear what you have to say. If you ask a (UAW) committeeman, they will just stand there with their arms folded.”

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