

A call to action to fight the GM plant closings and mass layoffs

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On Monday, General Motors announced that it is closing five plants in the US and Canada and wiping out the jobs of nearly 15,000 production and salaried workers in early 2019. The jobs massacre is the spearhead for a new restructuring of the global auto industry, threatening the jobs of millions around the world.

Ten years ago, the global financial crash was used by capitalist governments in the US and throughout the world to organize a massive transfer of wealth from the working class to the super-rich. A key chapter in this ruling class offensive was the 2009 bankruptcy of GM and Chrysler. The restructuring was overseen by Obama's Auto Task Force, a gang of Wall Street financiers who axed tens of thousands of jobs and gutted the income and workplace protection of autoworkers.

This was the signal for a similar campaign against the wages and benefits of the entire working class in the US and around the world. Last year, global wage growth fell to the lowest rate since 2008, far below the levels before the financial crash, according to a new International Labour Organization report.

Facing growing militancy from workers throughout the world, including the determination of US autoworkers to win substantial gains when their four-year contracts expire next summer, the job cuts make clear that the ruling class has no intention of lifting its boot from the necks of workers. Despite Trump's phony protestations over the GM job cuts, his administration, with the full support of the Democratic Party, is overseeing a further massive attack on the working class. Amidst growing signs of renewed economic downturn, the corporate and financial elite is determined to funnel ever greater sums into the financial markets.

Wall Street celebrated the plant closings and the announcement by CEO Mary Barra that the company would cut \$6.5 billion in costs, which will inevitably find its way into the portfolios of rich investors in the form of stock buybacks and dividend payments.

The consequences for the working class will be catastrophic. The shutdown of the company's Detroit-Hamtramck, Michigan; Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario plants will have a devastating impact on areas already plagued by decades of deindustrialization, poverty and social decline. More families will fall into destitution and have their homes foreclosed. There will be more family breakups, suicides and opioid deaths.

Autoworkers cannot accept the "right" of the corporate and financial elites to shut these plants down! An all-out campaign must be launched to defend these jobs, including the organization of demonstrations, strikes and plant occupations. The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* will be holding an emergency meeting in Detroit on Sunday, December 9 to discuss a strategy to prevent the closures.

A fight back cannot be carried out through the United Auto Workers (UAW) or its Canadian counterpart, Unifor. These organizations have long since ceased to be workers' organizations. They are arms of corporate management, run by privileged executives who profit from the destruction of the wages and jobs of the workers they claim to represent.

It has been 40 years since the UAW began its policy of massive concessions, starting with the 1979 Chrysler bailout, which was supposed to "save jobs." UAW Vice President Marc Stepp declared at the time, "I believe the company will have to trim operations down. We have free enterprise in this country. The corporations have a right to make a profit."

The result has been 40 years of unending disaster.

The number of GM, Ford and Chrysler workers has fallen from 702,000 to 140,000, while the wages, benefits and working conditions of autoworkers have been decimated.

More recently, in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2015, the UAW insisted that workers had no choice but to make more sacrifices because improving the companies' profits and international competitiveness would supposedly secure their jobs. Unifor gave the same justifications for pushing through concessions contracts on Canadian autoworkers.

These claims now lie in tatters. The only ones who have benefited from the endless concessions are the corporate executives, Wall Street sharks, and UAW bosses themselves, who control billions in corporate stock and have their golf trips, luxury resort vacations and designer clothing paid for with money robbed from the workers and recycled through union-management training centers.

Workers need a new strategy to fight back:

First, workers have to rely on their own strength. This means forming rank-and-file committees in every plant, completely independent of the UAW and Unifor. These committees must serve to connect not just GM workers, but all auto and auto parts workers in the US and in Canada. Workers, who produce all of society's wealth, have immense strength and leverage. A strike in any major factory could quickly shut down an industry dependent on an unbroken global supply chain and just-in-time deliveries.

Second, autoworkers must unite across all national boundaries. By its very nature this is an international fight. Workers must reject the nationalist poison long peddled by the unions to divide workers against each other in a race to the bottom. GM workers in Korea and workers at Vauxhall and Opel (both formerly GM) in Britain, Germany and other countries face plant closings and mass layoffs. The other global corporations are sure to follow GM's lead. If transnational auto giants have an international strategy to pit workers against each other, autoworkers must have an international strategy to fight them.

Third, given the social devastation involved with these closures, autoworkers have to reach out to all workers to fight. This means mobilizing the support of workers throughout the country in a common fight. The same ruling class counterrevolution that has destroyed

the conditions of autoworkers is behind the social devastation in Detroit, Lordstown and other cities throughout the country.

The development of rank-and-file factory committees among autoworkers will link up their struggles with those of other sections of the working class, including UPS workers, teachers, oil workers, steel workers and service workers, along with the unemployed and student youth. The logic of the struggles of workers is toward a general strike to oppose the bipartisan attack on the jobs, living standards and social rights of the working class.

Finally, this is a political struggle, which pits the working class against not just this or that employer but the entire capitalist system and both corporate-controlled parties, the Democrats and Republicans. A fundamental and revolutionary change in social relations is possible only if workers constitute themselves as an independent political force to fight for power.

Workers cannot fight plant closings and wage cuts if they accept the sanctity of the capitalist market. The Socialist Equality Party insists that a counter-offensive by workers must be guided by a socialist strategy, which aims to break the stranglehold of the banks and major corporations and reorganize the global economy to meet human needs, not private profit. Instead of being the private playthings of the rich, giant corporations like GM should be transformed into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the workers themselves.

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding an emergency online meeting Wednesday night at 8 pm EST/7 pm CST. The meeting will discuss a strategy for GM, Lear and all other autoworkers to unify their struggle against the companies and the corporate-controlled UAW. To receive information on how to attend, text Autoworker to 555888, or register here.



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