

As industry analysts point to 25,000 Ford job cuts

## Ford workers denounce GM plant closings and layoffs

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Ford workers in the metropolitan Detroit area denounced General Motors' announcement that it was shutting five factories in the US and Canada and laying off more than 14,000 hourly and salaried workers next year. Ford workers expressed support for a joint struggle with their counterparts at GM and said they would attend a meeting this Sunday to unite all workers against the GM closings and layoffs.

Yesterday, the Wall Street investment firm Morgan Stanley predicted that Ford would cut up to 25,000 jobs worldwide as part of an \$11 billion global restructuring plan. *Bloomberg Business* cited the firm's analyst Adam Jonas stating that other automakers would be forced to "follow GM's and Ford's actions" as "the industry transforms," closing factories that produce sedans and restructuring facilities to produce electric and self-driving vehicles.

Last week, Ford said that it was eliminating production shifts by next year at the Flat Rock plant and the Louisville Assembly Plant. The company said that 500 workers at each plant would be transferred to other locations. Company officials have refused to say what will happen to hundreds of temporary part-time employees (TPT) and Short Term Supplemental (STS) workers who have no seniority or recall rights.

"A big strike should be organized, and not just GM workers," said Jerry, who has worked at Ford's Flat Rock plant in suburban Detroit for six years. "Ford, Chrysler and everybody. I believe the workers should organize and get together and try to save our jobs. If it happens to GM, it can trickle down to everyone else."

Tommy, a Ford worker at the Woodhaven Stamping plant, told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that "Ford is saying there won't be any closings or layoffs, but they are just trying to calm the waters after GM's announcement. If there is a downturn, Ford will go after plants too. If GM can do this, any of them can.

"Workers are ready to fight because our jobs at stake.

Sunday's meeting is very important because the UAW is complicit in this. Both the company and the union want to get rid of legacy workers and have a workforce that is all made up of second- and third-tier workers.

"Things are going to get worse in the economy, and it's going to hurt workers who never recovered from 2008. I'm making peanuts, and they want to close plants in the US and Canada. Workers are rebelling in France, and it's going to happen here too."

In an article Monday, the *Detroit News* reiterated that the plant closings are being used by GM and the UAW to intimidate autoworkers who are determined to win substantial gains in the battle next summer for new labor agreements. The News quotes an analyst from the industry-funded Center for Automotive Research, Kristin Dzikczek, who said, "These are still very profitable companies, and workers want to be rewarded. But now there is this existential dread that this is the first shot across the bow. And the conversation shifts to what can be maintained versus what can be gained."

It is an open secret that GM and the UAW will seek to extract massive concessions from workers in order to "save" one or more of the plants. Many workers also speculate that the UAW and the companies may try to ram through new union-controlled health care coverage, which was overwhelmingly opposed by workers in 2015 and was one of the major factors in the initial defeat of UAW-backed contract.

"I say no concessions," said Jerry, the Flat Rock worker, who said he thought the GM announcement was being used to blackmail workers into accepting new givebacks. "We should get everything back that we lost. They're making billions of dollars, and what do we get? You know who is getting paid though? The one percenters up there in the UAW. They gave themselves a 31 percent raise."

The UAW "does not care about us," he continued. "They go on lavish vacations when they're supposedly negotiating

with the company. Why do they need to have bargaining sessions in Palm Springs condos? I think workers do want to fight," Jerry said, adding that he planned to attend Sunday's meeting. "We should get everybody united."

"The UAW are co-conspirators with management," Tommy, the Woodhaven worker, added. "The union is spending millions on golf outings, collecting 'strike rebates' from 300 locals across the country that go to a strike fund controlled by the International. The UAW hasn't called a national strike since 1976. I've seen them vote at the national convention to take \$200 million from the strike fund, which is supposed to be for us, and use it for their raises and bonuses instead. If you stood up and complained, they would escort you out.

"Workers throughout the auto industry want to fight," Tommy added. "I saw the Lear workers in Indiana stand up even after the UAW tried to divide the workers between the two plants and threaten them with the loss of their jobs if they rejected the contract. But they did it twice."

Andrea, another Flat Rock worker, said, "We hear about these layoffs on the news because the company and the union are so secretive. There was a town hall meeting at Flat Rock, and the plant manager said we were going down to one shift in April. The company only admitted this because the news was being leaked.

"They say that full-time workers are being transferred to Livonia and Dearborn, but when we asked the plant manager what was going to happen to the TPTs and STSs he refused to say. These layoffs are going to hit the supplier plants, like Faurecia and Dakota, too.

"The union doesn't fight for us because they're going to get paid anyway, both from our union dues and the company. They're in Ford and GM's pocket."

The December 9 meeting to organize opposition to the plant closings, layoffs and concessions is all the more important because these will not be the only plants threatened with closure.

"GM's actions with Lordstown, Detroit-Hamtramck and its Canadian plant in Oshawa, Ontario, may only be the beginning," the Detroit News wrote yesterday. "Plants in Lansing, Orion, Bowling Green and Fairfax are also at risk, judging by capacity utilization rates tracked by LMC Automotive, an industry consultancy.

"While these changes will help GM's overall capacity utilization, risks still remain for further capacity actions," LMC said in a study released Friday. "Certain plants like Lansing Grand River, Orion and Fairfax are well below ideal utilization rates, and could be targets if GM seeks additional cost savings."

Since the first Chrysler bailout in 1979, the UAW has insisted that autoworkers accept massive concessions to

make the corporations more profitable and "competitive," claiming this would save jobs. In the four decades since, the number of Big Three hourly jobs has fallen from 702,000 to 140,000.

The billions robbed from workers' wages, benefits and working conditions have been funneled into the bank accounts of corporate executives and Wall Street investors. A significant portion has gone to the UAW bosses themselves in the form of payments through various labor-management "training centers," millions in company shares and other bribes.

Now the auto corporations and the UAW are conspiring to impose even deeper concessions on workers. But there is widespread opposition among workers. This Sunday's meeting will outline the strategy and the organizational initiatives to build a powerful movement of the working class, independent of the corrupt unions, to stop the plant closings, mass layoffs and endless concessions. The guiding principle of such a movement must be that the right to a good-paying and secure job is nonnegotiable.

To fight for this workers must form rank-and-file factory committees, controlled democratically by workers themselves, to establish links between all auto and auto parts workers and broader sections of the working class, in the US and internationally, to prepare a counteroffensive against the capitalist profit system and for the social rights of the working class.

*The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding an emergency meeting in Detroit on December 9 to discuss a strategy for autoworkers to unify their struggle against the companies and the corporate-controlled UAW. We strongly encourage workers at Lear to organize a delegation to attend and inform other autoworkers about their fight. More information*



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