

Ohio autoworkers back fight against plant closures

A WSWWS reporting team
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Autoworkers throughout Ohio denounced the decision by General Motors to cut 15,000 jobs and shut five plants in the US and Canada, including the Lordstown complex near Youngstown, which is slated to close in March.

“I think it’s a death sentence,” said Tori, a Ford worker who lives nearby. “Me, the middle class and autoworkers bailed them out in 2008 and they are turning around and closing auto plants because they’re being greedy.

“They took the cash breaks and went with stock buybacks and all that crap and could care less about the workers. They came to us, the middle class, and now they’re firing us.”

Ford is also preparing massive layoffs. Wall Street analysts say they expect Ford to cut 25,000 jobs worldwide over the coming year. Both companies are moving out of car production in the US, while keeping their more profitable SUVs and small trucks. The Lordstown plant produces the Chevy Cruze, which is being discontinued by GM.

This past June, GM closed the second shift at Lordstown, laying off 1,500 workers. This followed the elimination of the first shift in January, displacing 1,000 workers.

In 2015, the United Auto Workers (UAW) pushed through massive concessions in the name of “saving jobs.” Just as the second shift was shut, workers found out that the UAW had signed a secret deal with the company allowing it to hire temporary workers, some getting paid only \$9 an hour, while senior workers were losing their jobs.

“I have 24 years with GM,” said one Lordstown worker who was laid off in June. “My unemployment lasts only a few more weeks and my SUB pay runs out in June.

“They told us it would only be for a short while, now the entire plant is closing. I’ve lived here my entire life. My whole family is here, I can’t move. I’m helping my daughter take care of her daughter while she works. Her

husband was also laid off. He worked eight years at the plant.”

Kim, a worker with over 30 years seniority at Fiat Chrysler, felt it was important for autoworkers to come to each others’ defense, pointing out that what is done at one company will be done at another. After the 2008 financial collapse, the UAW agreed to massive concessions, including cutting pension benefits for new-hires. Kim said, “All these kids came to work in 2008, once Chrysler was allowed to not offer pensions. Then all the companies did that.”

She emphasized the importance of mobilizing younger workers, including temporary-part time and other lower-tier workers, together with more senior workers. “This generation of workers,” she said, “people in their 20s and 30s, I was surprised that they turned the contract down. They want everything and they will fight for it and they will speak up. To pull them in and get them involved, then you’ve got something. That’s something I didn’t see for a long time, banding together like they do.”

Many workers are enraged by the betrayal of the United Auto Workers.

Tori said, “We’ve been having contracts full of concessions since [2008].” Referring to UAW officials who have pled guilty to taking bribes from Fiat Chrysler, she added, “I think they should get a lot longer prison sentence than a couple months, that’s for sure. It’s time to clean house.”

Tori continued, “It’s like we don’t have any rights anymore at our plant. Seniority at our plant doesn’t mean anything other than who’s out the door the fastest. It doesn’t apply to anything else at that plant. You can have 25 years at that plant and someone else hired two months ago can have better vacation hours and a better job than you just because they’re related to somebody. They [the UAW] get their family members hired in. Of course, they’re beholden to the company as long as they get

somebody hired in.

“A union member can have up to five family members hired in. When they give us applications, people in town hear about it. They’ll get on social media and say, ‘If you have a Ford application, I’ll give you \$500.’ That’s how badly people want a job. The union reps and management, they can get their family hired in on a regular basis.”

Tori denounced the multi-tier wage and benefit system, which the company and the UAW use to divide workers. “They try to keep the temps as long as they can,” she said. “It’s not fair that you have at least three different tiers of workers. You’ve got temps, you’ve got part-time temps, you’ve got second-tier workers and legacy workers. When they start to outnumber us, are they going to protect me and my pension if they think I didn’t care if they got paid \$10-\$15 less an hour? It’s not fair because they’re doing the exact same thing I am. They just pit everybody against each other.”

Tori agreed with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*’s call for workers’ control over working conditions, particularly when safety is at stake, noting, “Whenever you have a grievance about something, the union says, ‘Well, they’re allowed to manage any way they want.’ Then you ask, ‘What do we have a union for?’ and they say, ‘Your wages and your benefits.’”

“A few months ago we had a bad rainstorm coming through. There were a lot of leaks in the roof and they had to shut down production. The water got on the electrical panels that keep the machines running. Then they covered the panels up with plastic and said, ‘Go back to work.’”

“I said you don’t have to do that. That’s not the way electricity works. You could kill somebody by turning the electricity on. The team leader was telling us to go back to work and was yelling at me. I told the supervisor, we’re not going to start it up until you get health and safety. There was a lot of convincing because they think they have to do what they’re told.

“When you do something like that and stick up for your fellow workers, then you’re labeled a troublemaker. They retaliate. People that stand up for themselves and each other, they’re called troublemakers.”

Talking about the way forward for autoworkers internationally, Tori argued, “We need to get everybody up to the same pay and benefits around the world.”

Don, a worker at the Ford Lima engine plant with 19 years experience, also spoke about the betrayal of the UAW. “It’s a corrupt situation,” he said. “The union, from the local all the way up to the Glass House (headquarters in Detroit), is corrupt. We’re paying dues

to reps who don’t represent us.

“It’s like working for two companies when you walk through the door at work, Ford and the UAW. We’re paying 2.5 percent of our pay in dues to these guys now. They get together at their convention and the first thing they do is give themselves a 33 percent raise. It’s like a mafia.”

Grace just retired after 32 years at Jeep in Toledo. She told the WSWS, “Pensions haven’t gone up forever. I just retired and I’m getting the same pension my father did, who retired in 2007.

“Do you know how union dues work? They take one-third for the local, one-third for the international, and one-third for the strike fund. But they don’t use the strike fund for strikes. It’s a slush fund for the union. They don’t even allow strikes.

“How do you crank out 900 cars a day, sell them for \$30,000, and then claim that you can’t afford health care for your workers?

“There’s no such thing as a grievance. I had to file the same grievance four times. The union finally just blackballed me. The union’s been in bed with the company since the 1990s. I had a union rep brag to me back then that the company writes him his checks.”

On unifying the workers across borders, she said, “I totally agree with you. It’s about globalization.”

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* is holding an emergency meeting this Sunday, December 9 at 2 p.m. in Detroit to organize a fight against the plant closures. We urge all autoworkers to make plans to attend and organize delegations from your factories.



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