

Chicago ZF chassis plant to close, lay off 261 workers

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29 December 2018

ZF Chassis Systems Chicago, LLC, a supplier for the Chicago Ford Assembly plant, will permanently close its doors and lay off approximately 261 workers in March.

The announcement was made earlier this year by the German-based auto parts manufacturer ZF Friedrichshafen AG (ZF), also known as the ZF group, who reported revenues of \$35 billion in 2016. The plant, which creates suspension modules, opened in Chicago's south side Hegewisch neighborhood in 2004.

"We were not awarded the business for the new contract, which is why the plant is closing," ZF spokesman Tony Sapienza stated. "As March is the end date, the process to wind down operations is beginning now."

He continued, "The majority of employees at that plant have already transitioned to other jobs at Ford or the new supplier. ZF also relocated some employees to other ZF facilities. There are about 250 people employed at this facility, most of them are now temps as we continue to transition employees out as noted above. Employees who do not transition to a new position will get a severance that was negotiated with the union."

Most of the current temp workers make \$15 an hour, with many working 12-hour shifts.

According to online reports, Ford chose Dakkota Integrated Systems (Dakkota), also in Chicago, as its new supplier, after the company likely underbid ZF by offering a cheaper price for its services.

Some workers from ZF have transferred to Dakkota, with others likely to transfer to Flex-N-Gate, another automotive supplier, whose factory is set to open in early 2019 in Chicago's South Deering neighborhood.

No official reports have been released of how many

workers were able to or can transfer and obtain new positions.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 3212, which represents ZF workers, has said nothing regarding the layoffs.

Workers took to Facebook to expressed their anger over the impending ZF plant closure.

One worker wrote, "The workers have bills and family not fair..." Another said, "It sucks I'm one of those people who will be out of a job at the end of February. Yes I have been looking, but we all know how that goes."

One worker commented on the role of the ZF, Dakkota and the UAW, "They do not know how to treat their employees like human beings and the union will sell them out in a heart beat."

A current ZF worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter*, "I've been there two years now and we've known for some time that the contract was underbid and it was more of a matter of when the actual closing date was. Of course it's more devastating to the employees that have been there 10+ years but at the end of the day it's all our livelihoods."

"We had our final meeting thanking us for all our service. They're working with Dakkota Tower and Flex-N-Gate to place us if possible," he said.

Workers at ZF produce parts that are handled and used by workers to build SUVs, such as the Ford Explorer, at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant. ZF workers, past and current, and soon-to-be Dakkota and Flex-N-Gate workers are part of a workforce of autoworkers numbering in the tens of thousands who have suffered the brunt of relentless attacks by the auto companies with the assistance of the UAW.

The silence and inaction of the UAW in response to the ZF closure announcement is a further exposure of

the role of the UAW as a compliant tool of corporate management. It is, moreover, a warning: The UAW will do nothing if Dakkota and Flex-N-Gate announce layoffs and closures in the years to come.

The UAW responded to the recent announcement by General Motors of plans to eliminate nearly 15,000 jobs and shutter five plants with an explosion of nationalism, blaming Mexican and Chinese workers and implying workers must take more concessions in the upcoming 2019 Big 3 contract.

Instead of a fight they are urging workers to participate in prayer vigils and letter writing campaigns to GM executives.

These same UAW officials are implicated in a growing corruption scandal involving top UAW officials. Recently, Nancy Johnson, the top aide to former United Auto Workers Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Norwood Jewell, was sentenced to one year in prison for her involvement in a bribery scandal which involved millions in payouts to union officials by Fiat Chrysler.

As part of a plea deal, Johnson stated that former UAW President Dennis Williams authorized illegal fund transfers from joint union and company training centers to the pockets of the union.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* is taking up the fight to stop the layoffs and closures. On December 9, workers voted unanimously in favor of a resolution to oppose the GM layoffs and plant closures and form rank-and-file committees.

The resolution resolved to establish rank-and-file action committees, independent of the UAW, to mobilize workers across all industries “on the basis of their own demands, including abolishing the two-tier wage and benefit system, transforming temporary into full-time workers, rehiring all laid off and victimized workers, and fighting for industrial democracy.”

We urge ZF workers and all Chicago area autoworkers to join this struggle.



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