

UAW lawsuit against GM pits temporary part-time workers against laid-off Lordstown workers over jobs

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On Wednesday, the United Auto Workers filed a lawsuit in US District Court in Ohio against General Motors, alleging the company was violating a memorandum of understanding it signed with the union by employing temporary part-time (TPT) workers at the Fort Wayne Assembly Plant, instead of offering positions to laid-off Lordstown Assembly workers.

The UAW in effect is calling for the termination of some 700 Fort Wayne TPT workers to make way for former Lordstown, Ohio GM workers. In a statement posted on the UAW website, Terry Dittes, UAW Vice President for GM, said: “UAW members negotiated a binding agreement and we expect General Motors to follow the contract they agreed to and GM members ratified.”

The lawsuit is a reactionary maneuver by the UAW aimed at covering up its refusal to defend the jobs of GM workers at plants slated for closure. In November GM announced plans to axe 15,000 salaried and hourly jobs and close five plants in the US and Canada, including its Oshawa, Ontario factory, the Lordstown, Ohio Assembly Plant and the Detroit-Hamtramck facility.

The UAW’s response to the closures has included prayer vigils, letter writing campaigns and appeals to the Trump administration and Democratic politicians. This has been accompanied by the spewing of anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese nationalism.

The filing of the lawsuit by the UAW has had the immediate effect of pitting GM workers facing layoff against TPT workers, many of whom have been slaving for years at Fort Wayne and other factories with few benefits, without holidays and without basic contract protections.

The UAW had previously requested that GM eliminate the TPT workers at Fort Wayne by the end of December 2018 to make way for laid-off workers. According to the UAW, GM responded with a proposal to keep the TPT workers until the end of May.

At no point did the UAW demand that the TPT workers be made full-time with full benefits and rights.

The 2015 sellout contract signed by the UAW permitted the vast expansion of TPT workers in the auto factories, at a huge cost savings to the corporations. The use of these workers has played a role in facilitating layoffs since these workers cannot claim supplemental unemployment benefits and have no recall or transfer rights.

There is broad sympathy for TPT workers in the auto plants, who hate the brutal treatment meted out to these workers with the sanction of the UAW. The tragic death of Jacoby Hennings in 2017 at the Ford Woodhaven Assembly Plant shed a spotlight on the treatment of these workers, who the companies systematically pit against full-time employees.

The latest action by the UAW demonstrates its complete contempt for the younger generation of the working class. It further underscores the necessity of autoworkers organizing resistance to plant closures and layoffs independently of this rotten organization.

The UAW did not lift a finger to oppose the earlier layoff of thousands of workers at the Lordstown and Detroit-Hamtramck plants. Many of these workers were forced to relocate to plants hundreds of miles away or face permanent unemployment. The offer of jobs in Fort Wayne, Indiana to Lordstown workers is an insult, forcing workers to uproot families and move more than 250 miles to face a precarious future.

A veteran worker at the General Motors Fort Wayne Assembly Plant spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* about the announced UAW lawsuit. “The temps are scared to death,” he said. “It is a toxic environment. It is ugly.

“They want to get temps and full-time workers to fight against each other. What are the temps supposed to say when they are let go?

“When you have tiers it divides the workers. It is a rigged system against the workers.”

A laid off “in progression” worker at the Lordstown Assembly Plant said, “About 200 workers here have transferred to Tennessee (GM Spring Hill). It is kind of BS. For some it is their second or third plant.

“Is that something I really want to do? What if I go to Spring Hill and in a few months I’m sent to Texas? For me it’s a little easier since I don’t have a family, but with a family it’s harder. What if your spouse has a good job? You are kind of stuck.

“Some people will take an apartment and only see their family on the weekend.”

He opposed the efforts by the UAW as well as Democratic and Republican politicians to pit American autoworkers against autoworkers in China and Mexico as well as within the factories themselves.

“They are trying to divide us across borders,” he said. “They are also creating animosity inside the plants. I am doing harder jobs for less pay. They bring in temps and they are never hired full-time.

“I was lucky, I got hired in. Some work there for years and never get hired in. They get laid off and come back with no seniority.

“Even the workers who transfer from other plants face animosity because they may take the place of temps who workers liked. It was like that in Lordstown when workers came in from Detroit and Wisconsin.”

The Lordstown worker said that the company was making a systematic effort to drive out higher seniority workers. “They make it as hard as they can for you to stay until you retire. Your body gets beat up. There is more work and fewer workers. The easier jobs are being outsourced.

“They use new technology against us, instead of making our jobs easier. If a machine can do more, it means they can add more work. In some areas you are doing three or four jobs.”

GM workers should take a further warning. There is a

history of the UAW using lawsuits as part of legal maneuvers aimed at stripping workers of their rights. In order to establish control over the multibillion-dollar retiree health care benefits under the VEBA (Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association) the UAW joined GM in a legal action against retirees who challenged reductions in health care benefits. It did this to prevent workers from challenging the union’s “legal” right to negotiate concessions.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* reject the attempt to pit full-time and TPT workers against each other in a scramble for a dwindling number of jobs. We insist on the necessity for a common struggle by all autoworkers in the US and globally to defend all jobs and oppose all plant shutdowns and layoffs.

The December 9 conference of workers called by the SEP to oppose plant closings voted to initiate the formation of rank-and-file action committees independent of the UAW to organize opposition to the plant closures and to establish lines of communication between workers in the auto plants as well as with workers at Amazon, teachers, workers in Canada and internationally.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges all Lordstown and Fort Wayne workers and all autoworkers to contact us and join in organizing this fight.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact