

Jobs bloodbath at Ford and GM

Ford announces 1,000 job cuts as GM begins mass layoffs

Our reporters
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On February 9 at 2 p.m. EST, the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is co-hosting a demonstration in Detroit to fight plant closings, mass layoffs and concessions. For more information about attending the demonstration, go to wsws.org/auto.

US automakers began their jobs bloodbath on Monday as General Motors started dismissing 4,250 engineers, technicians, managers and other white-collar workers and the news emerged that Ford will eliminate the second shift at its Flat Rock, Michigan assembly plant by April 1, wiping out more than 1,000 hourly jobs.

GM plans to close five factories in the US and Canada, including major assembly plants in Detroit, Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario, and destroy more than 14,000 production and salaried workers' jobs.

In response, autoworkers and their supporters are preparing a demonstration this Saturday in front of the GM headquarters in downtown Detroit. "We are determined that workers are not going to be the forgotten men and women," said Jerry White, the editor of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, in response to the layoff announcement.

"No matter whether white collar or blue collar, all workers are part of the 90 percent of society that are the victims of corporate capitalism gone rampant," he added.

"The latest round of mass layoffs is another testament to the betrayal at the hands of the corporate stooges who run the United Auto Workers." White said. "The 40 years since the first concessions contract at Chrysler have made clear that their actions are not an accumulation of mistakes, but a deliberate policy of imposing the dictates of management on the workers.

"We are calling this demonstration as the first step in the mobilization of the working class throughout the United States, North America and the world in defense of

workers' social rights."

Throughout Monday, white collar workers at the GM Tech Center in the Detroit suburb of Warren and other locations were called into meetings and told whether or not this would be their last day of work. Workers left the front door of the complex with personal possessions, including office supplies and indoor plants. The refrain, "I lost my job," was heard over and over.

"The situation was tense inside," one worker told the WSWs. "We read about the layoffs in the *Detroit Free Press* but nobody knew who was going to be hit." Another said, "It was horrible and there are going to be more tomorrow."

Throughout the day, workers posted anonymous statements on thelayoff.com. "I was one of those that was escorted out and I asked why. No answer could be provided other than: a vague: it's a rough decision, business reasons, nothing personal. etc. I always had great performance reviews, I knew nobody was safe, but I was not expecting this. Some people let go today had over 20 years with General Motors. It's sad. It's the end of the road here."

"We've watched it countless times over two decades, people walked out like criminals," another post said. "Box in hand, walk you out to your car. I guess reality hits people sooner than others."

Last November, GM announced that it was eliminating more than 6,000 production jobs and another 8,000 white-collar jobs this year to save \$6 billion by 2020. After more than half of those offered exit packages refused to be pressured into "voluntary retirement," the company moved ahead with the mass firings.

This week's layoffs were launched in advance of Wednesday's release of GM's 2018 profit report, which is expected to show a reduction from the \$11.9 billion the

company made in 2017. The timing of the firings is designed to reassure Wall Street that company executives are determined to accelerate their brutal cost-cutting.

The scheduled plant closings are at the same time being used as blackmail to extract major concessions from 154,000 GM, Ford and Chrysler workers whose four-year labor agreements expire in September.

Even as white collar GM workers were being marched out of the Tech Center and other locations, a local ABC News affiliate in Detroit reported that Ford sent a notification on January 25 to the Michigan state government of a “mass layoff” of 1,012 workers planned for April 1 at the Flat Rock Assembly Plant in the downriver suburbs of Detroit. More than 3,500 hourly workers currently build the luxury Lincoln Continental and Mustang sports car at the Flat Rock plant.

The company, which last month reported North American profits of \$3.7 billion in 2018, is carrying out a restructuring of its global operations, which could affect 25,000 or more workers in Europe, Latin America and the US. This includes the shutdown of plants and mass layoffs in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Russia. Last month, the layoff of 12 workers at a Ford Brazil factory sparked a wildcat strike, forcing the company to rehire the workers.

According to a WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining) notice, the Flat Rock layoff would be “indefinite” and would affect 560 hourly nonskilled workers, 440 hourly nonskilled temporary workers and 12 salaried employees. A Ford spokesman claimed that while full-time workers would be offered transfers, likely to the Livonia Transmission plant, temporary workers, some who have worked at the company for years, are not eligible to transfer.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) made it clear that it would do nothing to oppose the shift elimination at the Flat Rock plant. UAW Vice President Rory Gamble told the *Free Press*, “We have been informed by Ford that due to sales, there will be scheduled work reductions at the Flat Rock, Michigan and Louisville, Kentucky plants. Our collectively bargained contract provides for the placement of all members displaced by the shift reduction and, after working with Ford, we are confident that all impacted employees will have the opportunity to work at nearby facilities.”

Gamble said nothing about the fate of the hundreds of temporary part-time workers, who are forced to pay dues to the UAW but have absolutely no rights. In the last UAW-Ford agreement, the union sanctioned a vast

increase in the number of these low-paid disposable workers.

Ford Flat Rock workers contacted by the WSWS expressed skepticism that they would, in fact, be able to transfer. There were also concerns about keeping their seniority if they did move to the transmission plant. Workers also expressed concern about TPT (temporary part-time) workers at the Livonia plant who would likely be fired to make way for full-time workers.

The mass layoffs underscore the bankruptcy and betrayal of the UAW and the Unifor union in Canada, which have claimed for decades that wage and benefit concessions would “save” jobs. The unions, which function as the industrial police force for the auto companies, have opposed any genuine fight against the plant closings and mass layoffs. Instead they are peddling economic nationalism, blaming Mexican and Chinese workers for the layoffs, even as tens of thousands of workers in Matamoros, Mexico are fighting the same globally organized corporations.

The February 9 demonstration, sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* and the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees, will call for the building of factory committees, independent of the United Auto Workers and the Unifor union in Canada, to unite workers throughout the US, Canada and Mexico with workers throughout the world to fight the plant closings and mass layoffs.

The demonstration will begin at 2:00 pm EST. GM headquarters is located at 300 Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit, Michigan. To sign up for updates, go to wsws.org/auto.

The author also recommends:

The program and strategy to defend jobs
[1 February 2019]



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wsws.org/contact