

Opposition mounts to GM plant closings

Our reporter
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As mass layoffs begin this week at General Motors, anger and opposition is mounting to the corporate assault on jobs.

Workers at GM's Detroit-Hamtramck plant, which is slated to close by June 1, were outraged over the company's announcement that it had made \$11.8 billion in profits last year, including \$10.8 billion in North America alone. The factory, which started operations in 1985, currently employs around 1,000 workers on one shift, a quarter of the 4,000 that used to work there.

Betty, a veteran worker with 18 years, said it was outrageous that the company was cutting jobs and destroying people's lives while making billions in profits. "They are telling people they have to uproot their families and move to Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky or Flint, Michigan to keep their jobs." She said the United Auto Workers (UAW) is doing nothing to stop the plant closings.

Two workers who were originally hired in by a contract company to do material handling said they would lose their jobs and had no transfer rights, although they pay dues to the UAW. Hundreds of part-time temporary (TPT) workers, who also pay UAW dues, also have no transfer rights. The two workers denounced the UAW because material handlers and TPTs do not qualify for the \$10,700 profit-sharing check from GM.

GM is closing the Detroit-Hamtramck plant, along with the Lordstown, Ohio and Oshawa, Ontario assembly plants. Transmission plants in the Detroit suburb of Warren and Baltimore, Maryland are also being closed, and there will be mass layoffs at the GM Brownstown, Michigan battery plant.

In a call with Wall Street investors Wednesday, GM CEO Mary Barra pledged that the corporate executives would slash costs to make more cash available for dividend payments and stock buybacks for their richest shareholders. She said GM would "problem solve" with the UAW to close underutilized plants and impose deeper concessions in labor negotiations this summer.

As GM started laying off thousands of salaried workers this week, reports surfaced that Ford will eliminate an entire shift, 1,000 jobs, at its Flat Rock Assembly Plant south of Detroit on April 1. GM, Ford and other automakers are carrying out a restructuring of their global operations, threatening the jobs of tens of thousands of jobs in North America, Europe, South America and Asia.

The Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees and the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* are holding a demonstration on Saturday, February 9 at 2 pm to fight the GM plant closings and layoffs. The march outside of GM world headquarters on Jefferson Avenue in downtown Detroit is being organized independently of the pro-company unions.

A central focus of the demonstration will be the call for the formation of rank-and-file factory committees to unite US, Mexican and Canadian autoworkers against the transnational auto giants. This is in opposition to the anti-Mexican campaign launched by UAW and Unifor in Canada to deflect workers' anger and conceal the union executives' collusion with the auto bosses.

Kathy, a GM worker in the Detroit area, said, "I encourage all of the affected and laid-off workers in and around the Motor City to participate in a very real working class struggle being formed all around the United States, Canada and Mexico!"

"People are creating rank-and-file committees committed for unity! For the working class! Show you'll be a part of the solution too and come stand in unity in opposition to the massive cuts by GM. We cannot allow our families and communities to be devastated for mere profit!"

On Wednesday, Fiat Chrysler announced a record 2018 net profit of \$4.08 billion, up three percent from 2017. The company said it shipped 2.6 million vehicles in North America, also a record. These massive profits have been extracted from the lives and sweat of workers, who have seen a continuing deterioration in conditions.

Angela, a Fiat Chrysler worker from Kokomo, Indiana, said, "The blood bath that's happening with Ford and GM is ruthless and disgusting! Unfortunately, this has been the nature of the auto industry for decades. The question is when will it change, who will change it? How can it be changed so corporate behemoths no longer wield the power to decimate the lives of entire communities, entire cities, entire states, and large sections of the population in the US and around the globe?"

"This is a class struggle, a working class struggle that will continue until we literally wrestle power away from the elites. We—the working class—far outnumber the elites, but we need to recognize our common interests, our sameness, our collective power to be a force for permanent and positive change for not just ourselves, but for workers everywhere."

A Fiat Chrysler worker from the Detroit area said, "I'll be

coming to the rally after work. I am fed up with the union. They have allowed all of this. It's a 'good old boys' club. It is getting unbearable in the plants. There is absolutely no safety. Workers have no lives. You eat and work, that's it. When I'm home, my husband is at work—there's no sitting down at the dinner table any more."

Asked about the strike by auto parts workers in Matamoros, she said, "The workers need to come together, that's the only way we can win. They have us pitted against each other. They use creed, color, religion—all to get us to focus on these things to make one person feel superior to another. They feed us these divisions on television—the claim that 'they' are taking our jobs. We are all in this together."

Referring to the bitter 2008 strike at American Axle, betrayed by the UAW, she added, "We were out for four months. Then the union told us to return for the same demands we were originally offered. American Axle then closed the plant altogether and the union did nothing. I had no respect for the union after that. There is nothing 'united' about them."

A worker from the Fiat Chrysler Jeep complex in Toledo also spoke in support of the fight against the GM plant closings. "The GM plant shutdowns are hurting those workers and many other people as well," he said. "I know what it's like to be laid off. A lot of people will be having a very hard time."

Explaining why he signed up for the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*, he said, "Up until now we haven't really had any source of information other than the union and the company. And the union hasn't done anything for us. They just take your money and side with the company."

Speaking about the strike by workers in Matamoros he added, "When you look at the strike in Mexico, you know we all really have to get together."

Ford has also announced profit figures, reporting net income of \$3.7 billion, a decrease from 2017 that the company blamed on tariffs as well as declining sales in China and Europe. North America continues to be its strongest segment due to the endless concessions handed over by the UAW.

The company has responded with a restructuring plan expected to lead to massive job cuts, largely targeting operations in Europe. However, the impact is also being felt in North America.

Workers at the Ford Flat Rock Assembly Plant south of Detroit are reacting with anger to the Ford announcement that it is cutting the second shift, with the loss of 1,000 jobs. The company has sought to deflect the anger of workers by claiming that more than half the workers set to be laid off from Flat Rock will be transferred to Livonia Transmission in the western suburbs of Detroit. However, temporary, part-time and low-seniority workers will be laid off in Livonia to make way for workers coming over from Flat Rock.

"The UAW is worthless across the board," a worker from Livonia Transmission told the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*. "All the ones who don't have seniority are going to be let go. It

was wrong to allow the company to hire temporary and part-time workers in the first place. They have got them under their thumb to use and abuse as they see fit."

"I support the demonstration," he added. "I hope there is a general strike. We haven't had one in forever. I have no confidence in the UAW, and I do not support a boycott of Mexican-made vehicles. I can read between the lines. They are just joining with Trump in an attempt to split the working class. I can't stand [Democrat] Ocasio-Cortez either. All she is is a public figure out to line her own pockets."

Shelly, who works at the Ford Oakville Assembly Plant near Toronto, Canada, said the factory had a parts shortage due to the strike by auto parts workers in Mexico. She said she had read about the Matamoros strike in the WSWs and supported the striking workers. "I was raised in South America and came here as a child. I went through a lot of temp agencies, which are just a racket, you know. I worked at so many places and I finally landed a good auto job. I feel very lucky, but things have changed so much.

"During the 2016 contract we were the only Ford plant that voted majority 'no.' We wanted to fight because they were making more tiers. There are at least four here. There are students and TPTs, and new-hires don't get pensions anymore. Unifor is a joke. They are only interested in profits and stocks, not workers."

Workers at the Japanese-based transplants in the US are also feeling the impact of Wall Street's demands for cost-cutting. A Nissan worker in Mississippi told the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* that he supported the fight of GM workers. "They just came from back on top, and now they are going to lay off people. It's going to affect a whole lot of towns and communities, not just the people at GM."

He reported that his plant had been impacted by the strikes in Matamoros. "I'm with the Mexican workers. When you work in harsh conditions, you have to do what you have to do to address the conditions. Hopefully, with it affecting Nissan the way it is, it will have an impact."



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