

Trump presses UAW to impose immediate concessions in bid to reopen Lordstown GM plant

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Over the weekend President Donald Trump exchanged a flurry of tweets with both the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors calling on the union and the company to come up with a deal to reopen the Lordstown, Ohio, assembly plant, which shut down March 6 after 53 years of operation.

The closure of the factory is another blow to an area that has been devastated by decades of deindustrialization. The Warren-Youngstown region in northeastern Ohio where the plant is located has been hard hit by the opioid crisis, reflecting the desperate conditions of wide sections of the working class. The final closure put 1,700 out of work with many facing a choice of unemployment or a gut-wrenching relocation to distant plants. Another 8,000 jobs at supplier plants are also threatened.

Trump is a bitter enemy of the working class. However, the right-wing evolution of both the unions and the Democratic Party, which have overseen decades of attacks on the jobs and living standards of the working class, has permitted the billionaire president to posture as a champion of the working class with calls for the revival of manufacturing in the US. Left largely unsaid, but already revealed by the realities of the record corporate profits and stock market rise celebrated by Trump, is the understanding that the supposed manufacturing revival will be accomplished by a drastic further lowering of workers' living standards, along with trade war and militarism.

The feigned concern by real-estate tycoon Trump for the fate of Lordstown is at least in part motivated by electoral calculations. Trump was able to eke out an Electoral College win over Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016 by carrying industrial states that had historically voted Democratic by claiming he would bring back manufacturing jobs.

The UAW has not lifted a finger to defend the plants threatened with closure by GM. Union officials say that the fate of the plants will be discussed during the upcoming 2019 contract negotiations. Translated, this means the UAW

will offer further concessions to GM in exchange for another round of worthless promises to keep plants open.

On Saturday, Trump tweeted, "Because the economy is so good, General Motors must get their Lordstown, Ohio plant open, maybe in a different form or with a new owner, FAST!" He went on to compare GM unfavorably with Toyota, which he said is "investing \$13.5 billion in the US."

The next day Trump tweeted, "Democrat [Lordstown] Local 1112 President David Green ought to get his act together and produce. G.M. let our country down, but other much better car companies are coming into the US in droves."

The call by Trump to re-open the Lordstown GM plant with a "new owner" should be taken as a warning. A takeover of a former GM stamping plant in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 2010 under new management resulted in demands, backed by the UAW, for a 50 percent pay cut.

Trump and Vice President Mike Pence also engineered the phony deal to "save" the Carrier heating furnace plant in Indianapolis, Indiana. After the state government handed the company massive tax cuts, it laid off half of the workers, and with the assistance of the United Steelworkers, forced remaining workers to labor 60 hours a week with mandatory overtime.

The UAW and Local 1112 President David Green hardly need any encouragement to ram through concessions. The local has long been a model of corporatist labor-management collusion, imposing national and local concessions to save jobs even as the workforce was reduced from 13,000 to 1,700 and then to zero.

In response to Trump's tweets, the international UAW issued a groveling message declaring, "Thank you for fighting alongside the UAW against GM. We will leave no stone unturned to keep the plants open!"

GM executives brushed aside Trump's denunciations, defending their corporatist relationship with the UAW. "To be clear, under the terms of the UAW-GM National

Agreement, the ultimate future of the unallocated plants will be resolved between GM and the UAW.” Management went on to tout its supposed concern for the affected workers, who the company has been slotting into jobs at other GM plants hundreds or even thousands of miles away.

Trump replied early Monday, tweeting, “General Motors and the UAW are going to start ‘talks’ in September/October, Why wait, start them now!”

In an interview Monday, Green continued to grovel before Trump, stating, “We’re doing everything we can ... to convince General Motors CEO Mary Barra to reinvest in GM Lordstown.”

Ohio Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown rushed to the defense of the UAW, criticizing Trump for his “disgraceful” attempt to ridicule Local 1112 President Green, while Brown promoted his American Cars, American Jobs Act, basically a taxpayer subsidy of US auto manufacturers.

Later Trump tweeted, “Close a plant in China or Mexico, where you invested so heavily pre-Trump,” and “Bring jobs home!”

Here Trump, Democrats and the UAW all line up behind the filthy lie that it is foreign workers, not the capitalist profit system and the insatiable appetite of the Wall Street investors behind GM, that are responsible for the destruction of jobs and living standards. But GM’s job cuts are part of a restructuring of the global auto industry, which is affecting workers throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. Last Friday, Ford announced it was cutting at least 5,000 jobs in Germany and the UK, just days after VW announced the elimination of 7,000 jobs.

The rebellion of auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico, along with recent strikes by autoworkers in China, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Brazil, the UK and Canada, show the possibility for developing a globally coordinated response to these attacks.

Since the 2016 election, the UAW has thrown its full support behind Trump’s America First nationalism and trade war measures aimed at the foreign rivals of US capitalism. At the same time it is desperately seeking to demonstrate its continued usefulness to the corporations by suppressing the boiling opposition of workers while handing round after round of concessions to management.

The policies of both the UAW and Trump, based on the unconditional defense of capitalism, are aimed at slashing the wages and benefits of American workers to boost the profits of the automakers while diverting workers anger and opposition by pointing the finger at workers in Mexico and China who are supposedly “stealing” jobs.

However, the UAW is widely despised in the auto plants for its total subservience to the corporations, highlighted by the ongoing federal corruption investigation that this week

netted Norwood Jewell, the lead UAW negotiator for the 2015 Fiat Chrysler contract. He was involved in a scheme to funnel millions of dollars in management bribes to UAW officials to obtain favorable contract terms. Lacking a popular base, the UAW apparatus is dependent for its continued existence on the patronage of the corporations and the government.

From the very first day of the announcement of GM’s plant closing plans, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* have been at the forefront of the fight to defend jobs. A December meeting in Detroit elected a steering committee of autoworkers that helped organize a February 9 demonstration outside GM headquarters in Detroit. Against the nationalism of the UAW, demonstrators called for the international unity of the working class in a common fight to defend jobs and oppose concessions. It advanced the call for the mobilization of the working class independent of the pro-company UAW through the construction of rank-and-file factory committees in every plant.

Preparations for the contract fight this summer must be made now through the formation of such factory committees in every location, and building the momentum for a national strike and cross-border strikes to restore the concessions handed over by the UAW, halt the plant closings and rehire all laid off and victimized workers at full pay and benefits.

No amount of appeals to the corporate owners can defend jobs. The fight against plant closures requires a direct assault on private ownership of giant industries and banks and placing the auto companies and other big corporations under democratic public ownership and the control of the working class, which produces society’s wealth.

This requires a break with both the Democratic and Republican defenders of big business and the development of an independent political movement of the working class for socialism.



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