

Ford layoffs provoke widespread anger

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There is a growing anger and apprehension among Ford workers in the US and around the world after the automaker's announcement that it will cut the jobs of 7,000 salaried workers by August. Top engineers and managers, who are required to hold graduate degrees, and many of whom also have decades of seniority, were subjected to the agonizing suspense of rumors followed by being called into meetings where they were terminated.

Some of those who were once considered among the most secure and well-placed in the company have been reduced to the status of workers on the assembly lines, who have suffered falling wages, benefit cuts and the constant threat of layoffs and plant closings that have been sanctioned by the United Auto Workers union. Some 900 engineers, managers, technicians and other salaried workers were cut in the US last week, in addition to the 500 workers who have already been forced to take "voluntary separations."

Ford CEO James Hackett, whose personal compensation rose 6 percent to almost \$18 million last year, calls the jobs cutting program, Ford's "Smart Redesign." The planned cuts that began at Ford world headquarters south of Detroit last week will continue in Europe, China, Russia and South America until 10 percent of a global salaried workforce of 70,000 are slashed by the end of August.

Analysts for Wall Street firm Morgan Stanley who scrutinize the company's balance sheet for investors are demanding, not 7,000 white-collar cuts, but more than four times that number, or a total of 30,000 salaried layoffs, to meet Hackett's promises of increased profits through cost cutting. Industry adviser Jon Gabrielsen told the *Detroit Free Press*, "No one who analyzes the Ford situation believes that 7,000 job cuts remotely scratches the surface of what will be required for Ford's long-term longevity."

In a post on the web site thelayoutoff.com, one salaried

Ford worker said, "Young professionals with tons of student loan debt should not expect to work at Ford for any extended period of time. See what the company has done to our parents, aunts, uncles, friends, etc. They push/throw old older, experienced employees like old shoes. They could care less about their employees. Glad I left last year. This is repeated behavior every 10 years. Work for a company that values your expertise and experience."

Another replied: "They lure in the kids every year with all sorts of promises. Telling them 'they are the future' and that 'they are the most prized and valued employees.' Just remember, youth is fleeting AND every year there is a new batch of kids they bring in. Within just a couple years, you too will be included in what they treat as 'old/ burned out dead weight employees.'"

Reporters from the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to production workers at the Dearborn Assembly Plant (DAP) about their conditions. A young worker had just been hired at a plant as a "Supplemental Temporary Status" (STS) employee, which means he works for half pay with no contractual rights while still paying dues to the UAW. "I was at Flat Rock Assembly Plant for three years, working nights, he said. "They just called one day and said, 'Hey, we are going to one shift,' and I was in the street."

The union gave no warning of the layoff. "The UAW told us the same day as the company announcement," he continued. "There were rumors but nothing official. They basically did nothing." New hires are routinely given the false expectation by both the company and the union that they will be rolled over to full-time positions within a matter of a few months.

"After three years, I am still an STS," he sighed. "I was working on and off, back and forth." Changing what needs to be changed, such conditions resemble the early years of the last century when autoworkers had to

gather at the gates each morning to see who the foreman would pick to work that day.

“Right now, we’re working four days a week at Dearborn Assembly Plant. They did not give me an end date. They say anything, except, ‘This is what we’re doing, so take it, or leave it.’ They literally have tiers of STS workers now,” he said.

“The UAW is the opposite of what they were in the ‘30s and ‘40s, when they were sticking up for the workers and fighting the company.”

Regarding the efforts by the Trump administration, backed by the Democrats and the UAW, to promote hatred of workers in China, Mexico and other countries, the young worker said, “These tariffs on Chinese goods are going to cause prices to go up and worse. We should cooperate with workers in other countries, everywhere. That is the direct opposite of what the country is doing right now. It makes no sense to me, or to any of us, to provoke a war, to provoke a trade war.”

A highly skilled, salaried employee with full seniority stopped to talk to us. “I’m a job setter and I have seen a lot of cuts over the years. I’ve never been laid off. But this time is different. If they close plants, nobody’s job is secure.”

A TPT or “Temporary-Part-Time” worker who has worked at DAP for two years said that he does not know when, or if, he will be hired in as a full-time worker. “It is unknown really,” he said. “I ask the union all the time, but they just string me along. They take dues out of my check every month, around \$50.00. But they can’t tell me anything. It is not right.

“That 6 percent pay raise that Hackett got last year is probably more than I will make in the next ten years,” he added. Even that lopsided calculation represents a vast underestimation of the depth of the actual class divide. Assuming rates of taxation and all other expenses were equal, it would take a typical TPT 600 years to earn as much as the CEO received in 12 months.

“I never trusted the government,” the young worker continued, voicing a growing conviction among workers of an approaching political struggle. “The company is a massive part of the problem, but it is more the government’s fault.” The vast expansion of second-tier workers, pay cuts and multiple layers of temporary and part-time workers was imposed under the restructuring of the industry engineered during the

first year of the Obama administration.

“I am ready to leave every day,” he continued. “If they told me that I have no chance of getting hired in at full pay, I would quit right away. I am more capable of tolerating this work than a lot of people. Workers all around me are broken down and hurting. I don’t know how they do it.”

In the face of falling sales and mounting signs of a coming economic recession, the corporations are restructuring their global operations to slash costs, boost investor returns and better position themselves for cost-heavy and cutthroat competition for the emerging electric and self-driving vehicle markets.

The global automakers, along with the UAW, intend to use the threat to jobs as a hammer to extract further concessions from 155,000 Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler workers whose contracts expire in mid-September. To answer this, production and salaried workers should form rank-and-file committees, independent of the corrupt unions, to prepare a national strike to stop plant closings, layoffs and overturn all concessions, including abolishing the two-tier wage system and transforming all temporary workers into full-time employees with full pay and benefits.

The global attack on jobs requires a global response by workers. This means rejecting the nationalism of the unions and big-business politicians and unifying autoworkers across all national boundaries to defend jobs and living standards. The giant industries built up through the collective labor of generations of workers must be transformed into public utilities, owned and controlled by the working class as part of the socialist transformation of the world economy. Only in this way can the great advances in science and technology be used for the common good to provide safe and reliable transportation and secure the livelihoods of the millions of workers in the global auto industry.



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