

Third round of layoffs in two months at Chicago Stamping Plant

George Gallanis
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For the third time this year, Ford Motor Company has announced plans to temporarily lay off workers at its stamping plant in suburban Chicago Heights. And once again, these layoffs are taking place in collaboration with the United Auto Workers.

Management announced the latest round in a memo posted February 13. The memo asked for volunteers to be part of a three-week temporary layoff from March 2 to March 23. The first round of temporary layoffs, affecting 270 workers, took place in January. Shortly afterward, UAW Local 588 representative George Pearson announced the second round of layoffs in a message on the union's mobile app, citing "a loss in volume here at our facility."

Earlier this month, a worker spoke on the boiling anger of plant workers in response to the layoffs, telling the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, "Morale is at point of mutiny. They're checking bags on the way in and out."

It is unclear if the new layoffs are an attempt by Ford's management to make up for the lack of volunteers for the previous layoffs. Whatever the case, the UAW has consistently worked with, not against, Ford's management to make the layoffs as smooth as possible. To undermine the growing unrest against the layoffs, the UAW has kept workers for the most part in the dark.

A team from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* visited the Ford stamping plant this weekend. Workers expressed shock and outrage at the new rounds of layoffs. Most stated they hadn't even heard about them. One worker said, "I heard about them but I didn't know when they were going to take place. They didn't tell us anything." When asked about the role of the UAW, she said, "Look, they keep us divided. One local is doing this, another that. We never know what's

going on. They intentionally do that."

Last year's sellout contract by the UAW with the Detroit Three has emboldened the company to continue their attacks on workers. At nearby Chicago Assembly Plant, UAW Local 551 colluded with the company to slash hours for workers under the bogus guise of avoiding "layoffs." Local 551 Chairman Coby Millender patted himself on the back in a Facebook post for "fighting behind the scenes" to avoid layoffs, while admitting that layoffs were still on the table as early as March.

The carousel of layoffs at Ford Stamping are part of a wave of cuts throughout the industry. Seventy miles to the west, Fiat Chrysler announced buyout offers for 3,900 workers at Belvidere Assembly Plant, only a year after eliminating the third shift. This week, roughly 800 General Motors workers in Detroit will go on layoff for 18 months while the company re-tools Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly as an electric vehicle plant.

Worldwide, over 100,000 layoffs are currently planned in the global auto industry. Together with General Motors, Fiat Chrysler, VW, Nissan and other global automakers, Ford is intent on making workers pay for an accelerating downturn in the auto industry.

Earlier this month, Ford announced a shakeup in its senior management team in the wake of a disastrous 2019 financial performance. Ford reported profits of \$47 million for the previous year, a decline from \$3.68 billion in 2018, a near 99 percent drop. Ford's declining profits will lead to further cuts and layoffs.

The collusion of the UAW in enforcing layoffs and cutbacks exposes the claims of so-called dissidents within the union bureaucracy that the UAW can be reformed. This includes Scott Houldieson, former vice president of Local 551, who is a leading member of the Labor Notes organization and a founder of a group,

Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), which launched a failed bid to amend the union's constitution to allow for direct election of its top leadership.

Even though they have taken place in his own backyard, Houldieson has not said anything on his Facebook page about the layoffs at Chicago Stamping or the cuts to hours at Chicago Assembly, nor has Labor Notes published a single word about either. With the failure of UAWD's campaign, Houldieson is now counseling workers to wait another year before trying again. The companies and the union will continue to carry out massive cuts in the meantime.

To defeat the jobs massacre being planned by the global auto companies, the Socialist Equality Party and the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* fight for the formation of rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the bribed UAW. Based on what workers need, not what the corporations deem affordable, rank-and-file committees will draw up a list of demands in every workplace. A network of rank-and-file committees will form the basis for an internationally coordinated counter-offensive by autoworkers, linking up with workers in Mexico, China, Europe and throughout the world, who are facing the same attacks.



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