

General Motors lays off 680 workers and eliminates third shift at its Spring Hill, Tennessee plant

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26 June 2020

On Wednesday, June 24, General Motors (GM) announced that it was preparing to file a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) with the state of Tennessee in announcing its plan to lay off 680 workers and eliminate the third shift at its manufacturing facility in Spring Hill. The layoffs, due to start as of July 31, are a reflection of the ongoing economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has tanked auto sales.

The layoffs will affect 525 production and skilled trades workers and 155 temporary workers and will be carried out based on seniority. They come as COVID-19 is spreading in the auto plants as the pandemic resurges nationwide. For its part GM is refusing to reveal the number and location of confirmed COVID-19 infections at its plants.

A WARN notice is required under the United States WARN Act of 1988, which requires “employers with 100 or more employees to provide 60 calendar-day advance notification of plant closings and mass layoffs of employees.” GM called the cuts that will devastate the lives of hundreds of workers an “adjustment.”

The Spring Hill Manufacturing facility, located near the major transportation route of Interstate 65, employs around 3,400 workers. It produces the Cadillac XT5, XT6, and GMC Acadia SUVs. The layoffs represent an approximately 20 percent reduction of the plant’s workforce.

Sales of the XT5 were down 32 percent year over year in the first quarter of 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The XT6, a new three-row crossover vehicle, had just 5,074 sales, while sales of the Acadia were down 43 percent.

Fearing the growing anger among autoworkers who

were being forced to remain on the job despite the ongoing spread of COVID-19 and noting wildcat actions by workers at several Detroit-area auto plants, GM halted operations on March 20. In late May, under the homicidal drive spearheaded by the Trump administration to force a return to work, Spring Hill began a phased reopening of the plant, beginning with first shift workers.

While the second shift returned on June 1, the return of third shift was up in the air despite GM’s previous plans of having full production capacity underway by mid-June. In comments to the *Detroit News*, a GM spokesperson stated that the reason for the delay was “due to near-term supply constraints and the need to further evaluate market conditions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.” Now, with auto sales slumping throughout the world, the company is taking an axe to jobs.

The United Auto Workers, for its part, is doing nothing to mobilize workers in defense of those being laid off. In a public post on Facebook, Local 1853 GM Chair Michael Herron, shedding crocodile tears, wrote the following:

“On a personal note, it is heartbreaking for me to have to send this notice out. All of the affected team members have done a phenomenal job building cars at Spring Hill Manufacturing. You are world-class workers and I pray that this layoff will be short in duration and that this economy will eventually rebound creating a need for the return of third shift. The union will continue to represent you and work to support you during this layoff.”

Herron’s comments underscore the analysis made by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist*

Web Site that the trade unions no longer function as workers' organizations, and instead exist to facilitate the dictates of the corporations. Indeed, rather than defending the needs of workers, the union instead enforces the needs of the capitalist profit system.

Speaking to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, one Spring Hill worker who is among those facing layoff said, "GM can afford it, but has chosen not to keep the workers. It's disappointing. This is what they do and the [UAW] accepts it."

Another worker at a facility in Jackson, Tennessee, which produces parts for the Detroit automakers wrote, "It's a shame about the GM Spring Hill facility doing that. We are one of their major suppliers of parts so it will inevitably impact us as well."

Regarding the UAW, the worker added, "The UAW, in my opinion, is about as corrupt as our own government. They have the power to force a shutdown to protect the workers, but have continued to stay quiet, just saying that they're 'working with management to stay on course with guidelines and keep workers safe,' which we all know is bogus.

"If they wanted to keep workers safe, we wouldn't be back to work so soon. If they were to shut down, it would stop our production, as well as other suppliers, thus keeping thousands of employees safe inside and outside the union. Like with anything that stands to profit in any form, the UAW has just become a puppet for the auto industry, pocketing workers' dues for themselves."

UAW Local 1853 officials notoriously called police on workers protesting the sellout deal negotiated by the union with General Motors last October outside the local's office. The UAW has played the same role throughout the COVID-19 crisis, attempting to pacify workers with worthless pledges of concern over health and safety while herding workers back into the factory under conditions where the virus is spreading uncontrolled.

While the virus is a product of nature the disaster it has produced is largely manmade, based on years of neglect of health care infrastructure and lack of planning. Workers should not be forced to bear the brunt of this through the destruction of their jobs and livelihoods. Workers should demand full pay and benefits through all layoffs and shutdowns.



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