

# Ford temporarily lays off thousands at North American plants, citing chip shortage

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*Are you an autoworker impacted by the temporary layoffs or by the COVID-19 pandemic? Contact us to tell your story. All comments will be kept anonymous.*

Ford Motor Company announced last week it would stop or reduce production at several plants across North America, citing a shortage of semiconductors. On Monday, Ford temporarily laid off thousands of hourly workers, many who will struggle to pay their bills without supplemental unemployment benefits.

Most production ground to a halt at Ford's factories in Chicago, Illinois; Wayne, Michigan; and Cuautitlan, Mexico. At Ford's Kansas City Assembly Plant, the company idled production of its lucrative F-150 pickup trucks, while another shift for Ford's Transit vans will continue to run.

Output at Ford's Kentucky Truck and Louisville Assembly plants, as well its Dearborn, Michigan, truck plant, will be operated either on single shifts or a reduced schedule. Ford also said it would eliminate overtime at its Oakville factory in the Canadian province of Ontario.

Kelli Felker, Ford's manufacturing and labor communications manager, told the press, "The global semiconductor shortage continues to affect global automakers and other industries in all parts of the world. While we continue to manufacture new vehicles, we're prioritizing completing our customers' vehicles that were assembled without certain parts due to the industry-wide semiconductor shortage."

Stellantis, also citing the chip shortage, reduced production of its Chrysler Pacifica minivans at its Windsor, Ontario, plant last week. Last year, Stellantis had announced that it would be laying off 400 workers in January at its Belvidere Assembly Plant, near Rockford, Illinois.

Labor shortages due to workers getting infected by the coronavirus have deepened the global supply chain crisis, as corporations and countries across the world fail to implement any serious measures to stop the pandemic, ever-more openly pursuing a criminal "herd immunity" or "live with the virus" strategy. At just one semiconductor plant in Malaysia, owned by French-Italian conglomerate STMicro, at least 20 workers died of COVID in 2021, as the factory was pushed to run nearly nonstop to meet overseas demand, according to a report in December by Bloomberg.

At the same time, Ford and General Motors made profits last year, while countless workers were sickened on the job during the Delta and Omicron surges. According to recent earnings reports, Ford reported \$17.9 billion for 2021 in net income globally. About \$8.2 billion of its 2021 net income came through Ford's financial speculation and non-productive investment gains from its stake in the electric auto startup Rivian. However, with the ongoing labor and supply chain crisis, Ford projected a reduction in output for the first quarter, causing a selloff of Ford shares by 10 percent on Friday.

While companies such as GM have sought to put forth an air of confidence that the worst of the supply chain crisis is behind them, financial analysts, as well as chip makers such as Intel, Nvidia, and AMD themselves, have repeatedly pushed back the target for a "return to normal" to the second half of 2022, or into 2023 or later.

Meanwhile, the auto companies and the unions continue to maintain a near-total information blackout on the number of COVID cases, making it difficult to determine to what extent the latest production disruptions have been driven by outbreaks at plants in the US. To fight for information on the spread of infections and the implementation of necessary safety measures—including the shutdown of non-essential production and full income protection for those affected—more and more workers have been organizing rank-and-file committees at auto plants, schools and other workplaces.

## Kansas City: "I pretty much live paycheck to paycheck"

Ford's Kansas City facility in Claycomo, Missouri employs over 7,520 workers and is down to just one shift this week. The plant has been ravaged by mass infections and deaths in recent months during the Omicron surge.

A worker at the Claycomo facility described the delays workers often face in getting unemployment pay, telling the WSWs, "Since I am C crew, this will be my first time this year filing for unemployment. It will be my 'waiting' week. I'll have to wait for the letter in the mail from unemployment and

then take it to the hall in order to get paid and that could be another week. So it's annoying.

"I pretty much live paycheck to paycheck," she added, "and my daughter's birthday is this month."

A trucker who delivers to Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne, where workers produce the Bronco and the Ranger, said, "My regular runs have all been canceled since last Thursday, and yesterday almost no one at my company was working. Things have been very slow at the plants.

"I think it's very telling," he observed on the relationship between the pandemic and the supply chain crisis, "that these plants will operate for as long as they possibly can until enough people refuse to work in unsafe conditions throughout the supply chain causing these shortages that force plants to shut down.

"I think we as workers need to organize that momentum into a coordinated strike to shut down all non-essential production until the virus can be eliminated."

### **Chicago: "It's crazy. Everyone has been getting it"**

At Ford's 98-year-old Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP) in the Hegewisch neighborhood, thousands of workers are out of work for the duration of the week and face hardship due to the idling of production. Ford's assembly plant in Chicago has over 5,800 workers and produces the Explorer and Lincoln Aviator sports utility vehicles, as well as the Police Interceptor Utility vehicle.

Last week United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 551 announced that the main plant would be on layoff, starting with B crew, from February 3 through February 13. A UAW spokesperson stated on Facebook that there were "multiple supplier issues" prompting the layoffs.

One worker replied, "We've been out of bcm [body controller] modules for a while now. They've been recycling them and just parking units outside." Body controller modules are electronic units in cars that control different vehicle parts, including windows, mirrors, air conditioners, locking and more.

Many of the plant's just-in-time auto parts suppliers and its workforce across the region in Chicago and the industrialized region of northwest Indiana, including Lear Seating, will also be impacted or idled. Ford's Chicago Stamping Plant in Chicago Heights, which employs 1,290 workers who supply sheet metal stampings for CAP, will also be affected by the slowdown.

While the UAW claims that the workers at the assembly plant will get 75 to 80 percent of their pay during closures, the temporary part-time and full-time workers will not receive any supplemental unemployment benefit (SUB) pay and will face immense hardship, being forced to rely on just meager state

jobless aid. In Illinois, the maximum weekly unemployment check for an individual is \$542.

The cruel conditions temp workers will face are the direct product of decades of UAW-backed concessions and sellout contracts, including the vast expansion of the use of temps forced through by the union during the 2019 contract struggle.

To add insult to injury, temporary full-time Ford workers affected by the layoffs who have newly been converted to become "in-progression" second-tier workers will not be eligible for supplemental unemployment benefits. A UAW Local 551 post noted, "You need one year of seniority as of the last day of work prior to a lay-off" to receive additional unemployment benefits.

As at many auto plants, workers at CAP have confronted the increasing threat of infection or even reinfection with COVID as the Omicron variant surged throughout the population since November. Last month, 32-year-old CAP autoworker Caleb Dye died tragically after a long battle with COVID-19. As has been the norm throughout the auto industry, the UAW did nothing to inform workers about Caleb's cause of death or to stop production despite the spread of the virus at the plant.

A Ford CAP worker spoke out against the unsafe conditions workers face from COVID and the cover-up by the company and the union as they attempt to keep workers on the job.

"It's crazy. Everyone has been getting it," he said, "but some people who've already had it don't say anything because you only get paid [sick leave] for the first time," adding that workers have had to deal with a large amount of bureaucratic hurdles in order to even get their unpaid COVID absences approved by management.

The worker said he himself had recently contracted COVID a second time. "Pretty sure I got it at work. A lot of coughing and some horrible body aches, and I got really tired very quickly."

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