

Temporary layoffs extended at US Ford auto plants, expand to other automakers

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Ford announced that it was extending temporary layoffs for workers at several of its US plants last Friday. Production was cut and many workers placed on temporary layoff (TLO) in the last week due to shortages of semiconductor chips and other parts, according to company labor relations memos.

At Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, all Temporary Full-Time (TFT) and many B crew seniority workers across departments will be on TLO through February 20. A robocall script posted on the UAW Local 551 Communications Facebook page stated to workers, “If you are on TLO the entire week of pay end February 20, 2022 you will need to file a claim for unemployment.”

TLOs were announced and posted at the Ford Kansas City Assembly Plant in Claycomo, Missouri on Friday. Most workers who produce the Transit van, as well as Truck A crew and all truck side TFTs, are laid off through at least February 20.

Workers themselves must file for their own unemployment benefits and cannot do so until after their claim has been activated by Ford. The lengthy process of securing unemployment benefits through antiquated and backlogged state systems leaves most laid-off workers in a financial lurch and unable to pay necessary bills on time. Workers find themselves waiting up to six weeks to receive any money.

Workers receive no real support in navigating unemployment from the United Auto Workers, which has helped the companies offset lengthy shutdowns through brutal levels of overtime, particularly at the most profitable plants. For this reason some workers have chosen to find supplemental jobs, further exhausting them, or have left for other employment altogether, exacerbating the problems of the production cycle.

“We’re going back to work next week for A crew and C crew only,” an A crew worker at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant told the *World Socialist Web Site* on Friday. “The week after that I heard A and C crew will be laid off again and that B crew will work that week. We will work a week and then be off for a week. And we don’t know how long they will be doing that, so it doesn’t look good for us right now.

“Unemployment is all messed up. The state of Illinois put in a new system called Okta and it’s a real problem. So now we have to sign into Okta, then sign into the state of Illinois just to file a claim. It will be about five weeks before we get any money for this week. And if we get laid off again, that will add to the wait. The unemployment office called us back three or four times per day, but hung up on us every time. It was very crazy just to get to file a claim.

“Of course the union people get to work and don’t have to go through all the BS to get paid. Ford and UAW people don’t care about the members getting paid, and then they get mad at you when you call them for help. But hey, Ford made 18 billion dollars last year and the CEO will get his 30 million dollars. Ford and UAW really don’t care about the people who really do all the work. There is really no appreciation for the workers.”

Ford made this announcement as several other US automakers announced that they would be shutting production lines at plants around the country. The automakers cited blockades by far-right activists at key border checkpoints between the US and Canada as the immediate reason for the disruption of parts supply chains.

This has disrupted the flow of critical parts from Canadian to US auto plants, such as engines built at Ford’s Windsor engine plants which are used in

SuperDuty pickup trucks assembled in Louisville, Kentucky and Avon Lake, Ohio. Avon Lake sent workers home and announced production shutdowns for this week. Workers were sent home from Avon Lake Friday due to the far right blockade, but the company attributes the production shutdown this week to the global semiconductor chip shortage, according to FOX8 News.

Other automakers curtailed production in the past week, with many citing the blockades at the US-Canada border as the immediate cause. Toyota announced its production had been disrupted at its Georgetown, Kentucky, assembly plant. General Motors cited parts shortages as the cause of a production shutdown at its Lansing, Michigan, plant, and has begun to fly parts over the border on airplanes to avoid the blockades, according to NBC News.

However, other factors are also in play in the ongoing supply chain crisis, which has gone on for a year. Chief among these is the massive spread of COVID-19 inside the auto plants, which has led to hundreds of workers quarantining at any given time at individual plants. At Stellantis' Warren Truck plant, management has attempted to offset the impact of these absences by working Supplementals for 72 hours a week.

For the past two years, the corporations and their business partners in the unions have refused to shut down production to prevent mass infection and death due to COVID. That production has only ever shut down due to shortages demonstrates that, as far as they are concerned, workers' lives are more replaceable than microchips or axles.

A Ford worker from Kansas City explained the conditions at the plant that have led to worker turnover and production problems. "People are not coming to work. Some are sick and some are fed up with these conditions. This is hard physical labor. You stand in one spot and your hands and arms swell up, and then on top of it you're treated like dirt.

"The younger people won't take it. They see how they're treated, they get sick, and they quit. Some take their break and they don't come back. They hired hundreds of TPTs around the end of last year but they still can't cover shifts because so many quit that they can't rehire them fast enough.

"You could have a whole line or department short on people because they're out for COVID and so they

have to move people from one department to work in another department just to keep the line running."

"They're keeping things more and more secretive," he said about the UAW and company hiding information from workers on who was sick or who had died in the plant. "It's amazing how they feel about human life—it's horrible."



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