

“We need to fight these people to defend our jobs”: Louisville Assembly Plant workers denounce threatened plant closure

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The deadline to mail in ballots in the UAW election to ensure that they are counted is in one week, November 18. For more information on Lehman’s campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.

Supporters of United Auto Workers (UAW) presidential candidate Will Lehman spoke with workers at the Ford Louisville, Kentucky Assembly plant Friday about the recent threats to the future of the factory.

A November 3 article published by *Automotive News* declared that “the future is in doubt” for the Louisville plant and its 4,000 workers, in reference to threats made by Ford CEO Jim Farley, who placed a question mark over the assignment of future production to the factory ahead of the 2023 contract negotiations with the United Auto Workers.

During the 2019 contract negotiations, General Motors (GM) threatened to shut down five plants, using the lives of thousands of workers as a bargaining chip to demand massive concessions. In the event, three plants were shut down while the Ford, with the assistance of the UAW, was able impose a concessionary contract that met none of workers’ basic demands.

The *Automotive News* article added that other plants were on the chopping block. “Louisville Assembly won’t be the only plant at the center of next year’s talks. The futures of GM’s Chevrolet Malibu plant in Kansas City, Kansas, and Stellantis’ Jeep Cherokee plant in Belvidere, Illinois, also are up in the air.”

In an open letter to the workers at Louisville Assembly, Lehman declared, “Far from defending jobs, the UAW is openly collaborating in their destruction. Ford is shutting the Romeo Engine plant outside of Detroit based on the 2019 UAW-Ford contract.

Stellantis (Chrysler) has slashed jobs at Trenton Engine, Warren Truck and the Warren and Sterling stamping plants—all in the Detroit area.”

He continued, “This corporate terrorism must be halted! I call for the full mobilization of all rank-and-file workers in the UAW to halt any further layoffs or concessions. It is time to draw a line in the sand: The rights of workers must take precedence over private profit!”

Workers responded with anger when made aware of this threat to their jobs, while expressing support for Lehman’s campaign. An electrician with 32 years at the plant said, “We need to fight these people to defend our jobs, whether the union says so, or not. I found Will on the *World Socialist Web Site* and I support him.”

Many workers at Louisville Assembly had been forced to transfer from one factory to another in the course of many years working at Ford. They are all too familiar with the experience of mass layoffs and plant closures. A worker named Chris had worked at Walton Hills in Ohio for 18 years before he had to leave in 2012 to come to Louisville. He felt that the recent company memo announcing the change of the plant manager was an ominous sign. “He has been here barely a year. He made this place a top producer. I don’t see why they would move him.”

He spoke of his experiences with plant closings and mass layoffs: “They keep it real quiet and then boom. They close the doors and you have to go. All they care about is profit. They don’t care about our livelihood.”

“I really do believe that they are going to close the plant,” said a young worker with four years at the factory. He went on to describe the unsafe and inefficient management practices. “It’s a mind-bender

how they run the plant. They don't care about the workers and they don't care about the cars. They will send them out the door without wheels as long as it's making them money."

Describing the potential impact of a plant closure, he added, "It would be devastating for the community. A lot of people in the plant don't know anything else."

At a webinar held November 6, Will Lehman declared that if the auto companies could not keep the plants open to provide the jobs that workers need, with decent pay and safe working conditions, COLA, pensions and full medical benefits, they have forfeited the right to manage the plants. Chris strongly agreed, "We produce all the profits. We should control what happens with that money and what happens with these jobs."

Another worker had worked at Atlanta Assembly until it closed. She had not heard about the *Automotive News* report, and expressed serious concern, "The new plant manager who is coming from KTP [Kentucky Truck Plant] is a plant closer. That is the talk going around the plant."

She added, "The union has downplayed it. They say it's just what they say at every contract. But this is a real threat."

When informed about this threat, Larry, an assembly line worker, said he didn't know there was a threatened closure, but wasn't surprised that no one from the UAW local had informed workers, "They're no help to us at all. I know we have a contract coming up next year and I wanted to find out what we had lost in the last one. I emailed our local and asked, but the only reply I got was that I needed to look at the last contract. But they stopped responding when I asked about getting a copy."

Ford Motor company has raked in over \$151 billion in revenue for the 12 months ending in September 2022, a 12.72 percent increase over last year. The company's 2021 revenue was over \$136 billion, a 7.23 percent increase from 2020. Ford CEO Jim Farley received over \$22 million in compensation for 2021, nearly double what he earned in 2021 (\$11.8 million).

The other auto companies have fared likewise. In 2021, General Motors took in over \$127 billion in revenue. Stellantis earned \$176.7 billion, a 78.55 percent increase over 2020.

While workers have had their wages slashed, their

benefits cut and in many cases their jobs destroyed, the auto companies have reaped a bonanza of profits. The corrupt layer of bureaucrats at the top of the UAW, who have agreed to these concessions, has also benefited handsomely during this period.

At the November 6 webinar Lehman declared, "Even as the UAW apparatus has overseen the loss of more than one million active members since 1980, its assets have stayed relatively stable. The bureaucracy has squeezed more and more dues out of us, while shifting more of its investments to the stock market, a blatant conflict of interest."

In his statement to Louisville workers Lehman concluded, "Brothers and sisters, we must take a stand to prevent another jobs massacre. If you agree with my perspective, I urge you to vote for me, and contact my campaign to discuss joining the growing network of rank-and-file committees."

For more information on Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.



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