

“Our rank-and-file committees need to spread to fight this”: Opposition grows to job cuts at Ford Rouge complex

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Ford is cutting two-thirds of the jobs at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center (REVC) in Dearborn, Michigan, forcing 1,500 workers to transfer to other facilities or take early retirements. Production of the F-150 Lightning pickup truck at the facility is being reduced to just one shift.

Up until three months ago, the facility was running three shifts. Since October, it has been operating on a two-shift, three-crew pattern, with one crew of workers on rotating layoffs, according to the *Automotive News*. The new job cuts, announced last Friday, are expected to be put into effect in early April.

Ford claims 700 workers from REVC will be transferred to the nearby Michigan Assembly Plant (MAP), where they are supposed to join 900 new hires on third shift to boost production of gas-powered Bronco SUV and Ranger pickup models. It is not clear whether the new hires will be temporary part-time workers. Under the new United Auto Workers contract, TPTs would only be paid \$21 an hour and subject to dismissal before reaching the nine months at which they would be rolled over to full-time.

Rouge workers reacted with anger to a January 19 letter posted by UAW Local 600 REVC and Dearborn Truck Plant Chairman Nick Kottalis, who claimed his “worst fears came true” when Ford announced that two shifts instead of one would be reduced at the REV-C building.

“According to my calculations, no one would be without a job,” Kottalis claimed, saying this was due to the transfers to MAP. The union official did not even pretend the UAW would resist job cuts, saying only that “more opportunities” for laid-off workers to transfer to other plants would open as workers accepted “voluntary

separation” packages included in the new UAW-Ford agreement.

“Everybody’s on edge over these layoffs at REVC,” a veteran worker and member of the Ford Rouge Rank-and-File Committee told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “For the last six or seven weeks, we have been working one or two days only to be laid off for two days. Michigan Assembly needs people but a lot of people don’t want to go over there. If I get transferred, I would have to quit. That’s a two-hour drive for me. My co-workers are talking about all the layoffs in Europe,” he said, referring to Ford’s plans to eliminate the remaining 3,850 workers at its plant in Saarlouis, Germany, with the complicity of the IG Metall union. “Our rank-and-file committees need to spread to fight this.”

In mid-October 2023, Ford Motor Company executive chair Bill Ford threatened to carry out mass layoffs and plant closures, including the entire Rouge Complex, if workers did not accept the contract terms demanded by the company. The rant was in response to the extension of UAW President Shawn Fain’s “stand up strike” to 8,700 workers at Ford’s Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville. As workers at the Rouge plant were demanding an all-out strike in the face of Ford’s threat, Fain quickly shut down the strike before forcing through the sellout contract.

The UAW bureaucracy’s supposed shock over the job cuts at REVC is a fraud. As the WSWs reported when Fain was pushing the UAW-Ford contract proposal last October, the deal specifically gave the company a green light to wipe out thousands of jobs at the Rouge Complex. Buried in the contract was a letter to UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, which stated, “Effective no later than December 1, 2023, the entire Rouge complex will be considered surplus” and eligible “for voluntary job posting opportunities” at other plants.

Another letter of understanding in the UAW-Ford contract states that “surplus UAW employees” at Rouge would be “allowed” to transfer to Ford’s planned EV plant in Tennessee, which is not scheduled to begin operations until 2025 and is hundreds of miles away from Dearborn.

Ford, like other automakers, is temporarily pulling back production and investment in slow-selling EVs, cutting F-150 Lightning production in half, reducing Mustang Mach-E output, shrinking its plans for a new EV battery plant in Michigan and postponing the opening of one of the two battery plants in Tennessee.

With the UAW deal, Ford achieved what it wanted most: the creation of a “flexible” workforce that can be shifted from location to location and reduced or expanded at will. Commenting on the Rouge job cuts, Ford CEO Jim Farley boasted, “We are taking advantage of our manufacturing flexibility to offer customers choices while balancing our growth and profitability.”

Stellantis CEO warns of “bloodbath”

Ford, GM, Stellantis, VW and the rest of the global automakers are engaged in a savage cost-cutting drive aimed at making workers bear the costs of the transition to EVs. Announcing the company’s new EV vehicle platform in Amsterdam last week, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares said sharp cost cuts were required to lower vehicle prices and capture enough sales and profits in the highly competitive EV market.

Without naming competitor Tesla, Tavares said some companies were sacrificing profitability to gain market share, and he would not do that. “If you go and cut pricing disregarding the reality of your costs, you will have a bloodbath,” he declared. “I am trying to avoid a race to the bottom.”

If automakers do not cut costs, Tavares warned, there could be greater “social consequences,” alluding to his previous threats to reduce the company’s “footprint” in the United States and Europe through plant closures and mass layoffs. “I’m trying to manage the right balance between protecting the footprint of my business and at the same time protecting my profitability, because I know that what is coming now is a big, big storm.”

On January 12, Stellantis fired 539 supplemental employees (SEs) in Metro Detroit and Kokomo, Indiana,

and the UAW admits 1,600 SEs could be terminated in coming weeks. This is on top of the nearly 3,700 layoffs in Detroit and Toledo, Ohio, scheduled for early February, which the company previously announced. In addition, the UAW contract cleared the path for the closing of 12 facilities, including the Tipton Transmission Plant near Kokomo, Indiana, and 10 parts distribution centers.

The company said the job cuts were part of its Dare Forward 2030 cost-cutting plan. In Italy, Stellantis is also carrying out 2,250 temporary layoffs at a plant in Turin, which produces the electric Fiat 500 and various Maserati models, including an electric one. The layoffs are scheduled to last from February 12 to March 3. At the same time, the company is accelerating its push to cut 2,100 salaried positions in Italy and another 6,400 white-collar workers in the US through buyouts.

The sudden firings have provoked widespread opposition from SEs, who were told by the UAW bureaucracy that they would be rolled over to full-time positions under the new labor agreements.

The most conscious and organized expression of this opposition has come from the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which has called for an international counteroffensive by workers against mass firings and job cuts. On Saturday, the IWA-RFC held an online webinar that brought together temporary and full-time workers, along with workers in other industries, to discuss how to stop the job cuts and coordinate the fight against the global automakers across national boundaries.



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