

Ford announces mass layoffs at flagship Rouge complex west of Detroit

Tim Rivers
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Ford Motor Company officially announced Wednesday that 1,400 workers at its flagship Rouge manufacturing complex in Dearborn, Michigan, 40 miles west of Detroit, would be cut effective immediately. The press release stated that half of the workers would eventually be reassigned to the Michigan Avenue Assembly Plant in Wayne, Michigan. Another 700 will be pushed into early retirement. There is speculation that those 700 employees will be on layoff for at least two months before starting in the Wayne plant.

A supporter of the Ford Rouge Rank-and-File Committee reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that many workers at the MAP facility were complaining of short work weeks and even doubted the shop could absorb another 700 workers.

Both the company and the union have been talking about the coming layoffs since the bogus stand-up strike last fall. But until Wednesday, everyone's job was supposed to have been secure. The 700 forced early retirements represents a sharp acceleration of job destruction at the company.

Those affected will receive a one-time payment of \$50,000. After taxes and union dues are taken out, they will be left with only enough to support themselves for a matter of weeks while they search for another job.

This is the latest salvo in the onslaught of massive job cutting that is already underway as every auto manufacturer has been studying how to exploit electric vehicle technology that requires 40 percent fewer man-hours to produce.

The threat of layoffs at Ford Rouge have been in the air since the bogus "stand-up strike" organized by the UAW President Shawn Fain last fall. In response to the sudden shutdown of the Kentucky Truck plant in Louisville, as the UAW was preparing to wind up the

strike, William Clay Ford Jr., the great-grandson of the company's founder and the current executive chairman, convened an angry press conference to threaten the entire work force.

Such an intervention in the middle of a contract negotiation was unprecedented. The executive chairman was angry and let it be known. In his opinion, every worker at the company should consider himself lucky to have a job. After years and decades of givebacks and concessions that produced record profits for the stockholders, Ford was furious that workers had the temerity to shut down a profitable factory. Layoffs at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center began immediately after he spoke. Two-week furloughs affecting first the B Crew and then the C Crew began right away.

Many workers at the complex are angry and disgusted with the response of the United Auto Workers. A supporter of the Ford Rouge Rank-and-File Committee told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "[UAW President Shawn] Fain promised us job security. It was supposed to be the best contract ever. But we don't know whether we are going to have a job, or not."

He went on to describe the role of the Local 600 President and Shop Chairman Nick Kottalis, who came to the Rouge after entering a shop committee at the Wixom Plant before it was shut down and demolished. "Any time he gets asked a question, Nick says he doesn't know," the supporter said. "We don't know if he's withholding information, or what. Nobody trusts the union anymore."

Another supporter of the committee added, "The union employs a lot of trickery. They work with the company. The plant manager came in the shop and said everybody will have a job. But I don't believe that's true. They were planning these layoffs well before the

strike.”

Before Christmas, the company had threatened to lay off a shift from the Electric Vehicle building. But on January 18, Kottalis issued a memo to all REVC and DTP employees that doubled that number. He wrote, “Two shifts will be reduced (instead of just 1) in the REVC building.” In an attempt to tamp down opposition, he claimed, “According to my calculations no one will be without a job.”

Four weeks later in mid-February, Ford Chief Executive Officer James Farley spoke at the Wolf Research Global Auto Conference in New York. “As the company looks at the transition from internal combustion to electric vehicles,” he said. “We have to think carefully about our manufacturing footprint.”

He then repeated the executive chairman’s threat to slash thousands of jobs. “Our reliance on the UAW turned out,” he said, “to be we were the first truck plant to be shut down.” In other words, everything was going fine as long as the workers were taking pay cuts and giving up vacation time and medical leave—the UAW had not struck the company since the 1970s.

The Rouge RFC member said, “The union is confusing people so that they are totally caught off guard. They thought they were all going to MAP after the layoff. Now they are saying they have to fill out a preference form for a job here at DTP. And they don’t know what’s going to happen. They are putting you through these changes deliberately to frustrate people and make you feel powerless.

“This is so totally contrary to what they said when we first started orientation, and they said how much they cared about the people. This is the Ford family. It is so totally different. These are mean people. I did not think it was going to be like that because I thought paying union dues meant they would help me.”

Constant threats, manipulation and lack of information have taken their toll on the workers at Rouge. Most, but not all, of that burden has been silent and unseen. In the last few weeks, three active workers have died.

A photo of one appeared in the union Facebook page with the caption: “In Loving Memory / Paul Andrew Rochon / December 1, 1966–March 9, 2024 / From your Dearborn Truck Family.”

Paul transferred to DTP from a plant in Virginia and worked on the line. At Rouge he fell in a pit in the

chassis department and was seriously injured. When he returned to work after a long recovery, he was placed in the labor relations office. He could no longer work down on the plant floor. He was always very helpful, very friendly. On a freeway up north he lost control of his vehicle and hit a tree.

The RFC supporter commented, “It’s been a wild week and a half. Three co-workers passed away. Yesterday the cops were here at medical. It’s been a lot to swallow. We have ambulances every day. The other day we had three in one day. We never had that before.”

Rose Ford died in a head-on collision after work. A lady by the name of Lee Lee, who worked in the body shop, died of an asthma attack following a family reunion. She couldn’t breathe.

A worker who knew her commented, “The body shop is filthy. I don’t understand why they would have her in that spot knowing that she does have that condition. You have thousands of workers who are suffering from these conditions. They don’t want to spend money to clean up the plant.

“I get sick every other week in there. I actually throw up and vomit all over the place. It’s filthy. Absolutely! I told them there is something over here that is making me sick. I never throw up at home and feel like this. My heart starts to race and the next thing you know I have to throw up.”



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