

General Motors cuts 1,000 salaried jobs, while UAW covers for its role with bogus “Keep the Promise” campaign

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In the wake of mass layoffs by Boeing and carmaker Stellantis, General Motors said Thursday that it is laying off 1,000 mainly salaried workers from its global operations, with most of the cuts coming in the US.

The largest number of cuts are coming at the General Motors Tech Center in Warren, Michigan, where 507 salaried workers along with some United Auto Workers-represented hourly workers are losing their jobs. Part of the job cuts were the result of management’s new ranking system, which targets workers “who do not meet expectations” for termination.

In August GM eliminated nearly 1,500 from its software division globally. The total included 634 at the Warren Tech Center.

In announcing the layoffs, management issued its standard justification, citing market pressures and extending hypocritical “thanks” to those being axed for their help in enriching the corporate oligarchs. “In order to win in this competitive market, we need to optimize for speed and excellence. This includes operating with efficiency, ensuring we have the right team structure, and focusing on our top priorities as a business.” It further added, “We are grateful to those who helped establish a strong foundation that positions GM to lead in the industry moving forward.”

GM Chief Financial Officer Paul Jacobson has said the cuts are part of a drive to cut costs in order to increase profitability, including to its money-losing electric vehicle business.

The company said that in addition to the cuts at Warren, it was suspending its Yuma Desert Proving Grounds in Arizona and permanently closing its Durability, Corrosion and Teardown departments at its Milford Proving Grounds in Michigan.

The cuts also come in the wake of another 1,100 layoffs at the Jeep complex in Toledo, as well as 400 job cuts at the Universal Logistics parts sequencing plant in Detroit. Many workers at the logistics facility had previously worked at the Jeep plant in Toledo.

Recent layoffs and cuts have also taken place at the Indiana Transmission plant in Kokomo, Indiana, and other Detroit-area plants, including at Warren Truck, Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack and Sterling Heights Assembly Plant. The escalating jobs bloodbath is aimed at shifting the cost of the transition to electric vehicles onto the shoulders of workers.

Ford Motor recently laid off a shift at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Complex in Dearborn, Michigan, through the end of the year. The facility builds the electric F-150 light truck.

Job cuts in the auto industry are escalating worldwide as employers seek to slash costs in the EV transition.

Recent cuts include 9,000 jobs by Nissan, the planned closure of three plants in Germany by Volkswagen along with a 20 percent pay cuts, and 4,500 layoffs by Audi. Stellantis has previously threatened mass job cuts in Italy. Last week Sumitomo Rubber announced the closure of its Tonawanda, New York, tire plant at the cost of 1,550 jobs.

The job massacre is having a wider impact. Economists calculate that every auto assembly job supports 10 jobs in the wider economy. Workers at the Toledo Supplier Park next to the Jeep plant are facing layoff in January, including over 200 workers at Mobis, a company that makes chassis and engine assemblies for Stellantis and KUKA Toledo Production Operations, which is cutting 160 jobs.

The global character of the cuts requires an internationally unified response by the working class. Last week, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) issued a call for “a global campaign against job cuts in auto and other industries.”

The IWA-RFC declared it “rejects the ‘right’ of the capitalists to control production to maximize profit by driving workers into the ground. Instead, we fight to realize the social rights of the working class through workers’ control over production, through the transformation of the giant corporations into public utilities.

“This campaign must be organized as a rebellion against the labor bureaucracy in every country, which is helping their ‘own’ capitalists compete against foreign rivals by enforcing layoffs and wage cuts,” the statement continued. “In every country, the unions are run as bureaucratic dictatorships, totally uncontrolled by the workers within them. The apparatus must be abolished and power transferred to the rank and file.”

This has been demonstrated by the response of the United Auto Workers, which has not even acknowledged the cuts at GM as of this writing. Instead of a genuine fight in defense of jobs, the UAW has promoted its bogus “Keep the Promise” campaign, based on empty threats of strike action over alleged contractual violations by Stellantis, including the company’s delay in reopening the shuttered assembly plant in Belvidere, Illinois.

The campaign launched back in August, despite much bluster, has not resulted in any actual job actions. UAW President Shawn Fain suffered a humiliating vote of no confidence last month when Stellantis workers at Kokomo Casting in Indiana, Fain’s home plant, failed to authorize a strike in a vote held last month by the local union in relation to the “Keep the Promise” campaign.

On Thursday, Kevin Gotinsky, director of the UAW Stellantis department, issued a tepid statement on the recent rash of auto layoffs, calling them “unacceptable” and pledging to fight them where “they violate our contract.”

The UAW letter claims that the cuts were the result of poor management and trade policies not the fundamental class antagonism between workers and employers under capitalism. “We are also taking action to make sure jobs stop leaving the country under broken federal trade agreements, and we are going to have to fight on multiple fronts to save this company from itself. Many of us have experienced situations in the past where leaders stood idly by while the company ran roughshod over our contracts and our livelihoods. We won’t let that happen.”

A veteran worker at Warren Truck explained the bogus character of the so-called job guarantees in the “historic” 2023 contract. There were “unpublished letters” between the UAW and management, he said. “They make agreements with the company that the membership wouldn’t know about.”

He pointed out that the letters on investment commitments all have management escape clauses stating “that work coming in is contingent or based on the market. They shouldn’t allow that kind of language. What constitutes a ‘downturn’ in the market? They can define it any way they want.” An arbitrator could then “override the contract,” he emphasized.

In the wake of the Democratic Party election debacle that resulted in the victory of Trump, the UAW has signaled its willingness to work with the incoming fascist president, despite past mutual denunciations.

Trump has said Fain should be “fired” and called him a “stupid person.” Last month, Fain said Trump was “a billionaire who’s never worked a real job in his life,” calling the now president-elect “a scab.”

But the UAW has not ruled out working with the Trump administration on the basis of their shared program of rabid American nationalism and support of trade war against the foreign rivals of US capitalism.

In a letter following Trump’s election, Fain said the union would work with any politician on bringing back “American jobs,” including renegotiation of the “broken USMCA [United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement] trade deal.” During Trump’s previous administration, the UAW and other unions worked closely with the White House to extract concessions from Mexico favorable to US big business.

A worker at the Detroit Assembly-Mack plant described the situation to the *World Socialist Web Site*. “Another 50 workers were just laid off. All the third shift workers were laid off, all the temporary part-timers were fired, and now a total of 400 full-timers have lost their jobs.

“They’ve gotten rid of everybody with 2021 seniority, and they’re starting to go after the guys who were hired in 2020. The layoffs are very upsetting. These guys have kids, and they don’t know what’s going to happen to them. They’re relieved that they’re getting healthcare insurance for a year, but no other job they find is going to pay half of what they got here.

“The laid off workers get \$362 a week max in unemployment, and SUB (supplemental unemployment benefits from the company) pays \$700. But a lot of people run into problems when they file a claim for benefits on the state’s call-in system. And if you don’t get an unemployment check, you’re not going to get SUB pay either.

“If MARVIN (Michigan Automated Response Voice Interactive Network) doesn’t like you, you’re going down from a regular

paycheck at Stellantis to zero income. Even if you’re getting the maximum, a lot of guys were enticed into the car lease program.”

He explained that under the program, the company pays for insurance and repairs, but now workers are saddled with “anywhere from \$570 to \$1,050 a month on the lease and now they are out of work.”

He added said that even those who are working are seeing a lot taken out of their checks in taxes, “to pay for all the bombs and wars.”

The Mack worker continued, “There’s a lot of turmoil in the plants now. We’re back on a nine-hour shift, but no one knows what is going to happen next. They’re cutting jobs at the Universal Logistics facility near our plant. After telling workers last year’s contract was ‘historic’ and would save jobs, no one has any confidence in Fain, who is a real, professional scab.”

The veteran Warren Truck worker said, “They are being purposely vague (about the status of laid off workers) to create uncertainty in people. A lot of skilled trades who were laid off went to apply at GM and Ford and got called, a few retired and went to GM.

“Some are going to different plants. As far as in progression and part-time, they are holding them in limbo. Bringing them back a week and then laying them off.

“Uncertainty is a tactic they use to force people to quit or take a buyout. Then they turn around and ramp back up. It’s because electric vehicles need less people to build a car. But, it seems they could use them somewhere else in the company.”

He said workers were supposed to be notified of openings at other plants based on seniority. “Under the contract they can’t hire someone off the street.” He explained that the company used various means to undercut workers’ right to transfer. “They will purposely call you outside your market area, somewhere far away like St Louis, you can only turn it down a couple of times. They have all kinds of dirty tricks. They get fancy with the language, they say 50 miles, it’s as the crow flies. That’s what they use to keep you from getting a relocation. That was negotiated by the old administration that was taking the bribes, but it didn’t get changed in this contract.”

We call on workers to build and expand the network of rank-and-file committees organized independently of the pro-corporate UAW apparatus. Workers interested in building and joining rank-and-file committees or sharing information about conditions at your workplace should contact the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter.



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