

# Volkswagen to cut shift at Chattanooga, Tennessee plant in one week

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*Work at VW Chattanooga? Fill out the form at the end to get in touch about forming a rank-and-file committee to fight the job cuts, or to share your thoughts. Your identity will be kept confidential.*

In one week, Volkswagen is set to cut one of three shifts at its assembly plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

In its announcement of the cuts on March 12, VW cynically portrayed the move as an effort to “consolidate production into a highly efficient two-shift model,” claiming it would enhance “competitiveness and agility.” In reality, the cuts will deprive workers of their livelihood, while confronting those who remain with speed-up and overwork.

The company has stated that it is offering buyouts in a “voluntary attrition program,” but has not stated how many positions it is targeting, nor the number of potential layoffs if it does not meet its buyout target.

VW’s Chattanooga plant employs over 4,000 workers, producing the ID.4 electric SUV, Atlas, and Atlas Cross Sport models. Volkswagen Group is the second largest automaker in the world by number of vehicles sold, behind only Toyota.

Workers at the plant have expressed growing anger over the cuts. “It is so important to us at Volkswagen to demand a strike vote,” one commented on Facebook. “It is time to save our company and community from these greedy people.”

The shift reduction in Tennessee is part of a vast corporate restructuring and jobs massacre throughout the global auto industry, aimed at imposing drastic cost-cutting measures on the backs of workers.

Shortly before Christmas, Volkswagen announced the elimination of over one-third of its German workforce—35,000 out of 120,000 jobs—in the largest job cut in the European auto industry since World War II.

Last Monday, Volkswagen subsidiary Audi announced it would be cutting up to 7,500 positions in administration, sales and development in Germany by 2029, representing approximately 14 percent of its workforce in the country, or 8 percent of its global employees. Other VW subsidiaries that have announced cuts recently also include Porsche (1,900 jobs) and Autovision and Cariad (4,000).

In the US, Stellantis, Ford and GM have carried out a wave of layoffs in the aftermath of the 2023 United Auto Workers

sellout contract, shedding thousands of jobs. On Friday, Stellantis announced yet another round of “voluntary” buyouts targeting workers at 20 plants and warehouses in Michigan, Ohio and Illinois.

The global scale and prevalence of the attacks on jobs requires that autoworkers organize themselves across national boundaries to effectively leverage their power and defend their livelihoods.

In a statement responding to VW’s initial job-cutting plans last October, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) called for “a global campaign, including worldwide pickets and rallies and culminating in international strike action” to defend jobs. The statement explained, “The ground for this must be prepared by establishing lines of communication between autoworkers in the US, Germany and other countries,” through the expansion of the network of rank-and-file committees throughout the auto industry.

Workers at the VW Chattanooga plant should immediately begin organizing their own rank-and-file committees on the shop floor, in order to share information, connect with workers at GM, Stellantis, Ford and other auto companies, and discuss preparations for collective action to defend jobs.

## UAW bureaucracy promotes nationalism, seeking to block fight to defend jobs

At the Chattanooga VW plant, as elsewhere, workers are confronting not just the ruthlessness of management, but also the treachery of the pro-corporate union bureaucracy. The United Auto Workers (UAW) apparatus, having secured union recognition at the plant last April following earlier rejections in 2014 and 2019, is in the midst of talks with the company over the first contract at the plant.

VW’s most recent “conditional” contract proposal included wage scales which would leave Chattanooga workers behind those at the Detroit Three, with VW hourly workers topping out at just over \$39 an hour by the end of the four-year deal, according to a report by *Automotive News*. The company also refused to include crucial demands by workers, such as a retirement bonus, shift premiums, and increased paid time off.

In the face of the company’s intransigence, however, the UAW is not genuinely organizing opposition, but rather

actively working to suppress it.

In response to the cuts at Chattanooga, the UAW filed a “unfair labor practice” with the National Labor Relations Board, alleging that VW failed to “negotiate” the cuts with union officials. Volkswagen has responded to the suit by asserting that it had been negotiating with the UAW bureaucracy for months regarding the shift reduction. If this is the case, it would mean that UAW officials knew about the impending cuts but deliberately withheld this critical information from the workers.

While the union apparatuses have long promoted impotent appeals to the NLRB in an effort to suppress the class struggle, the latest move by the UAW has taken on an even more sinister character.

In announcing the NLRB suit, UAW President Shawn Fain issued a filthy nationalist statement explicitly promoting illusions in the far-right Trump administration, declaring, “The UAW has notified the Trump Administration of Volkswagen’s unacceptable, anti-union, anti-worker, and anti-American conduct. It is no accident that they want to ram through a layoff in America in the days before expected auto tariffs take effect, as they profit from high exploitation labor in Mexico.”

Fain’s statement is in virtual lockstep with the extreme nationalism of the fascistic Trump presidency, falsely presenting the billionaire as a defender of workers’ jobs. In reality, Trump and Elon Musk—the world’s richest man and CEO of Tesla—are working to slash hundreds of thousands of federal workers’ jobs and shred Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, and other bedrock social programs. These attacks are part of a broader effort by the oligarchy in the US to make workers pay the cost of massive military funding and preparations for war with China.

The statement by Fain marks a further effort by both him and the UAW apparatus to ingratiate themselves with the fascist president, who Fain has repeatedly pledged to “work with” to “defend American jobs.” While Fain increasingly grovels before Trump, the UAW bureaucracy has refused to lift a finger to defend UAW members at universities who are being seized Trump’s border gestapo and threatened with deportation for participating in protests opposing the genocide in Gaza.

The tariffs Trump is threatening to impose—which Fain and the UAW leadership fully support—will not protect jobs. Far from it, they will unleash economic chaos in an industry deeply integrated globally, rapidly leading to catastrophic layoffs and plant closures throughout North America.

While Fain and the UAW bureaucracy have rhetorically fumed against the supposedly “anti-American” Volkswagen and Stellantis, they have largely remained silent about the attacks on jobs by supposedly “American” companies like GM and Ford. But each of these corporations employs massive international workforces, with workers in different countries objectively bound together in a complex web of production, and every vehicle today made from parts and labor from all

over the world.

The UAW bureaucracy’s aim is to deflect workers’ anger away from their common enemies—the transnational corporations that exploits workers in every country and the financial oligarchy that own and control them.

At the same time, the denunciations of “anti-American” companies are used as a smokescreen to cover up the UAW bureaucracy’s intimate collaboration with management, regardless of whether their offices are in Detroit or Germany. In 2016, a secret agreement between the UAW and VW surfaced, exposing the union bureaucracy’s willingness to assist VW in imposing cost-cutting measures. The UAW explicitly promised to help VW in “maintaining and enhancing cost advantages” over competitors in exchange for VW’s neutrality in the union vote, effectively collaborating with the company in pitting Chattanooga workers against their class brothers and sisters in Germany and other countries.

The UAW’s nationalist arguments could just as well be turned around and used by the IG Metall union in Germany to argue that “German” jobs at VW can only be saved at the expense of those in the US and Mexico. In fact, the union bureaucracies in every country are employing these arguments to divide workers against each other in a race to the bottom and to support “their own” national capitalist class.

The urgent task facing Chattanooga VW workers is to decisively reject the nationalist, pro-corporate policies of the UAW apparatus. Workers must instead organize rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy, to unify autoworkers across North America, Europe, Mexico, and globally in a common fight to defend jobs and working conditions.

These rank-and-file committees must immediately appeal to VW workers in Germany facing similar attacks, as well as workers at other automakers confronting layoffs and wage cuts.



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