

“Of course people are going to be laid off because of this”: US autoworkers react to the launch of Trump’s global tariff war

Our reporter
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Within hours of the imposition of President Trump’s sweeping tariffs against the world, the impact was felt by autoworkers in North America, with the announcement of thousands of layoffs by Stellantis at plants in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

On Wednesday, Stellantis announced a two-week shutdown of its Windsor, Ontario van plant, impacting 4,500 workers, and a month-long shutdown of its Toluca, Mexico facility that employs around 2,600. Another plant in Saltillo will be down for two weeks. Those shutdowns will cause the layoffs of 900 US Stellantis workers at supplier plants in the Detroit area as well as Kokomo, Indiana.

As the catastrophic implications of the tariffs for world trade came into focus Friday, equity markets plummeted around the world, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average down 2,231 points Friday and the S&P 500 down a whopping 6 percent. Some \$6 trillion in stock values were wiped out in just two days of trading. JP Morgan economists boosted their warnings of a global recession to a 60 percent chance.

Many workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* were conscious of the grave threat posed to jobs and expressed contempt at the support given to Trump’s tariff policies by the United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain. The UAW chief has falsely praised Trump’s trade policies as pro-worker and claimed tariffs will create jobs.

WSWS reporters spoke to workers at Stellantis Detroit Assembly Complex–Jefferson Friday afternoon. Many said they had heard of the layoffs and expressed concern over the fact that Fain was supporting Trump’s ultra nationalist trade policy.

“There is no such thing as an American-made car,”

said one worker. “We are making a world product.

“If the union really was for the workers it wouldn’t be supporting Trump’s tariffs. Of course people are going to be laid off because of this.”

In remarks last Sunday, Fain doubled down on his support for Trump’s tariffs, claiming that tariffs could be separated from Trump’s reactionary attacks on immigrants and mass firings of federal workers. In fact tariffs are central to Trump’s entire ultra-nationalist agenda, aimed not at boosting employment and living standards for American workers but preparing for world war against the overseas rivals of US imperialism.

Another Jefferson worker added, “I don’t believe anything Fain says. He got elected and now he has got his, they all have. These layoffs are only going to be the beginning.”

A worker from Ford Michigan Assembly, who had dropped a friend off at work at Jefferson, said, “We support Stellantis workers. We all need to stand together. We need to do something about Fain; he is running amok.”

Another Jefferson worker said, “Tariffs will affect us. They will increase prices and people are not going to be able to afford to buy cars.”

In other factories similar discussions are taking place. A worker from Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania said, “As a UAW member working in the heavy truck industry, I know first hand that we rely on Canadian manufacturing for some of our heavy steel components. These are not parts that other companies are set up to start readily manufacturing. I also know that the Class 8 truck manufacturers all rely on the same suppliers. We and they will not just be able to call

an American company and say, ‘we need this part as soon as possible.’

“We will continue to order from our regular suppliers and be forced to pay the import tariff. This WILL be passed on to the customer. Customers will pass their costs on to their customers. We are supposed to engage in fair trade with countries like Canada. We buy parts from them. They buy finished trucks from us. I think it was a good relationship until very recently.

“My car was made in Japan. Car prices, as well all know, went sky-high during the pandemic. It drove used car prices up like crazy, too. Supply and availability was a HUGE issue. The tariffs definitely won’t be helping with any of that. If anything, it will probably decrease the availability of cars. So, guess what? It will drive the prices of American cars up, too.”

While Ford has not announced any restructuring measures in the wake of the tariffs, former Ford CEO Mark Fields told CNN, “The cost of vehicles will go up. It’s just math. The bottom line is there is absolutely no vehicle that won’t be impacted by tariffs.”

A worker at the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant (DTP) spoke to the WSWS: “Despite the fact that we see millionaires and billionaires who are very affluent and seem to be very powerful, something very disturbing is brewing underneath it all. America cannot maintain this facade of wealth and power.

“If they have to wage war around the world, seizing other people’s resources to keep their way of life afloat, it cannot survive. They cannot live off a lie that has to rejuvenate itself through ill-gotten gains. Not anymore. We are facing a massive cataclysm.”

A coworker at DTP added: “The tariffs are already costing jobs. I heard the steel plant near Rouge laid off a lot of people. we are going to have a major problem here. It’s insane what Trump is doing.

“Everything is a combination of parts and components and electronics from all over the world. Items will be shipped, like, for example, from China to here and back and forth and be charged 25 percent, like, two or three times or more; every time they cross the border.

“The oligarchs all agree the working class has to pay for it. There ain’t no sweat off their back what we go through. Shawn Fain’s salary is \$274,000 a year. He says tariffs are saving American jobs. They are not.”

He spoke about the sellout 2023 auto contract and the

phony “Stand Up strike” that kept most workers on the job producing profits for the auto companies. “Shawn Fain pushed that contract. The layoffs started as soon as the contract was signed. They laid off two shifts at Rev C immediately. That building runs the worst I’ve ever seen any Ford plant run.

“The world we live in squeezes you until you’re flat as a pancake. That’s the way you feel. That’s probably the way everybody feels in the plant.

“Friday, we didn’t have enough people, so they put the team leaders on jobs. They talk on the radio. ‘We need another body’—‘We need five bodies’—‘We need seven bodies over here.’

“You’re just a body. It gets really stressful because the operator is not getting stock properly. It might be in the wrong place. And the manager starts yelling and people start yelling at each other.

“You get your 20-minute break and you’re so exhausted because of the stress and tension. When people leave, it gets worse.

“When I go to Kroger’s I can tell they’re short-staffed and they’re pushing people to do more and more; like they’re wearing five hats. it’s too much. It’s everybody.

“It’s being done to benefit the oligarchs.”



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