

One month after Cleveland Cliffs Dearborn Works layoffs, UAW stages token protest

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It has been more than one month since steelmaker Cleveland-Cliffs began the layoff of 600 workers at its Dearborn Works, first announced in March as part of a wider program of job destruction that has eliminated more than 2,000 full-time positions in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota. The cuts take place as Trump's tariff war gathers steam. The company blamed weak demand, financial losses and shifting trade policies for the closures.

The affected plants include: the Steelton Mill, in Steelton, Pennsylvania that closed June 30 eliminating 559 jobs. Another 115 were cut at Conshohocken, Pennsylvania during the summer, along with 305 in Riverdale, Illinois around the same time. Some 255 miners in Hibbing, Minnesota were laid off in May while another 400 miners were idled at the Minorca Mine in Virginia, Minnesota.

Cleveland-Cliffs is in the process of restructuring its operations to focus on steel production for the auto plants in line with Trump's plan for a fortress America as the administration prepares for war against China and other global rivals.

The layoffs at the Dearborn steel mill began a month ago when it idled operations on the blast furnace, the basic oxygen furnace steel shop and the continuous casting line. Finishing operations at the company, like the pickling line tandem cold mill and the hot dip galvanizing line are still operating.

Most of the losses nationally impacted workers at facilities represented by the United Steelworkers Union. But in Dearborn, Cleveland-Cliffs workers are members of UAW Local 600, a holdover from the time the steel mill was owned directly by Ford as part of the Rouge complex.

When the cuts were first announced, the UAW and USWA did nothing and said nothing. Their main

concern was not the defense of jobs of their members, but to suppress rank and file opposition in order to ensure that share prices and corporate profits were not affected.

After months of virtual silence the UAW, facing mounting worker anger, held a token protest outside the Dearborn Works in the early afternoon of August 14.

The cuts at the Dearborn steel operation continue a jobs bloodbath in the auto industry as the auto companies restructure in increasing cutthroat global competition, ramping up exploitation and slashing jobs. Little more than two years ago an entire shift was wiped out at the Ford Rouge Dearborn Truck Plant to be followed by two full shifts at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center under the terms of the contract signed after Fain's bogus "stand-up strike."

The loss of jobs has brought the intensification of exploitation on the job through speed-up, job overloading and the destruction of safety. Workplace injuries and deaths have simultaneously skyrocketed. A few recent examples at Rouge include the death of Tywaun Long who died of a massive heart attack on April 17, 2024 on the finals line at the Dearborn Truck Plant. His death was very likely associated with his having contracted COVID-19 at the plant when he was forced to work during the worst of the pandemic.

Long's co-worker Tyriell Wooten died after an emergency surgery exactly one year later on April 17, 2025. His death was quickly followed by that of another co-worker Darrius Williams, who collapsed and died at the end of a shift. Adding insult to injury, workers have reported to the WSWs that the UAW has colluded with the company in targeting and victimizing those friends and co-workers who have turned to social media to denounce company negligence in the deaths of their colleagues.

If last Thursday's rally was intended to give the impression that the UAW was finally taking up a fight against these conditions, it back-fired badly. It displayed only the complete divorce of the union apparatus from rank and file workers. A group of at most one or two hundred union officials, Democratic Party politicians, some retirees and a few active workers met at the union hall on Dix Road in Dearborn, Michigan and marched a half mile up Miller Road to the Cleveland-Cliffs offices opposite the Ford Dearborn Truck plant.

Rather than wage an actual struggle, UAW President Shawn Fain mobilized local Democratic Party politicians to plead to Cleveland-Cliffs officials to make investments in the mill as allegedly promised in the previous contract.

"In 2024, Cleveland-Cliffs agreed to invest \$300 million in the Rouge," Fain declared at the event. "Today, we're seeing them go back on their word. Instead of making these investments, they've laid off over 500 members of our union family." Newly-appointed UAW Vice President Laura Dickerson, who oversees the Ford department for the union, got on the bandwagon with her boss, adding through a microphone that she "thinks we've got the company's attention."

Cleveland-Cliffs CEO Lourenco Goncalves in an emailed statement disputed this claim. "With just one year into the 4-year Agreement, Cleveland-Cliffs has already spent \$125 million at the Dearborn Works facility," Goncalves wrote. "Therefore, we are in full compliance with the Agreement (we are actually ahead of the committed pace). Additionally, Cleveland-Cliffs will definitely spend the remaining \$175 million during the next three years."

Fain and Democratic politicians such as Representative Debbie Dingell, a long-time shill for the automakers, doubled down on their support for Trump's reactionary tariff war, only criticizing its erratic character. "We've seen a mass exodus of jobs," Fain said. "We support tariffs, but they've got to be structured tariffs, strategic tariffs. All this shifting back and forth and going from 100 percent one day to 40 percent to 15 percent to 5 percent, no one can plan that way."

Dingell said she supported steel tariffs but not the other "chaotic tariffs." She said, "Steel is the backbone

of the American economy, and we're not playing on a level playing field." Detroit Representative Rashida Tlaib, a prominent member of the Democratic Socialists of America, was on hand to add her support for the political poison of Trump's trade war.

In a separate statement, the Cleveland-Cliffs CEO joined in the support for tariffs declaring, "The tariffs are working because we are seeing car manufacturers producing more cars in the United States and fewer cars abroad, not enough for us to restart the blast furnace yet, but we will."

The support by Fain for tariffs and Trump's trade war policies demonstrates the UAW apparatus stands squarely in the camp of war and social reaction. The tariffs, which amount to a social tax on the working class, are not aimed at protecting the jobs and livelihoods of American workers but at building a fortress America in preparation for global war.

A genuine fight for jobs can only be waged in bitter struggle against the capitalist system and the big business two party system based on an international strategy, uniting workers across industries and national borders. Workers must link the fight to defend jobs with the fight against war, austerity and for the defense of democratic rights. Rank and file workers must break with Fain, Dickerson and the entire trade union apparatus who are tied hand and foot to the corporations and both political parties of big business.

They must organize independently as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees to defend every job and establish safe working conditions in every plant. The problem of mass layoffs is inseparable from the deadly conditions that prevail in every factory. They can only be fought by uniting workers internationally in the struggle for workers control and socialist cooperation between workers throughout the world.



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