GM hits Factory Zero workers with another layoff as UAW maintains silence over escalating job cuts

Jerry White
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General Motors has again idled its flagship electric vehicle plant in Detroit, temporarily laying off the 1,300 workers on the last shift left running at the factory. Factory Zero stopped production on March 16 and is not expected to restart until April 13, leaving the workers without pay for a month.

The latest shutdown comes less than three months after a mass permanent layoff and the elimination of an entire shift. It is a devastating new blow to workers who have now endured a relentless cycle of overwork, temporary shutdowns and permanent job cuts stretching back years.

Last October, GM had announced it would permanently eliminate more than 1,200 positions at Factory Zero and slash operations to a single shift. The cuts cascaded immediately through the supply chain: supplier Avancez laid off 143 workers in Hazel Park, Michigan; Dana Thermal Products closed its Auburn Hills plant, cutting 200 jobs; Autokinition eliminated 133 positions; and Yanfeng cut another 192.

Hundreds of additional layoffs hit EV and battery plants across the Midwest and South—550 indefinite layoffs and 850 temporary ones at the Ultium Cells plant in Lordstown, Ohio, and 710 temporary layoffs at the Spring Hill, Tennessee Ultium Cells facility. Now, with the April shutdown, those who survived the first wave of cuts find themselves once again pushed into economic limbo.

GM spokesman Kevin Kelly offered corporate speak in response to press inquiries, saying that "Factory Zero will temporarily adjust production to align EV production with market demand" and that "impacted employees will be placed on a temporary layoff and may be eligible for subpay and benefits in accordance with the GM-UAW national contract."

United Auto Workers Local 22 President James Cotton told reporters he was "disappointed that the EV market has failed to take off as expected" and blamed the Trump administration's elimination of the $7,500 EV tax credit and rollback of tailpipe pollution rules. "I never feel great about any layoffs," Cotton said, "but sometimes market demand may impede production." That anodyne response stands in sharp contrast to the fury and anxiety among workers on the shopfloor.

"It just seems strategic to me"

A veteran Factory Zero worker described the information blackout by the UAW local as near total. "Not a thing," he said flatly when asked what the union had told workers. "The communication gap is very huge. We kind of hear things a day or two before it happened."

The worker said he and many colleagues were caught off guard—even as they suspected something was coming. "Before we left, they said something about we were at overproduction, but all of a sudden we had a shortage of parts too. So, I really don't know. I can't gauge it."

He noted the suspicious timing of the layoff, coming just after workers had received their profit-sharing checks. "You lay us off, so at least two of the three weeks, we're gonna dip into our savings—if we have that. Basically, it's just stretching us out. So, when we do go back to work, we're going to need to go back to work because we're not going to have any money. They want to keep us insecure."

He described the impact of rising gas prices, which recently surged past $4 per gallon because of the war against Iran. "You can't go anywhere. You're basically down to the essentials—if you got to go to a doctor's appointment, go to the grocery store, pick up your kid, visit your parents. You can't waste any frivolous money. You got to save everything you have."

"This is a completely criminal war," he said. "Trump isn't even hiding it. He's saying, 'We're going to take their oil.' That doesn't get more brazen than that. It's like—you were supposed to be the head figure of the most powerful country in the world, and you are acting like a thug. A straight thug."

He expressed contempt for UAW President Shawn Fain who claimed to oppose Trump during the presidential elections but has since embraced the fascist president and his trade war measures. "He's just going along with Trump and keeping his mouth shut."

He described the impact of multiple contracts establishing different pay scales for the same work. "That's what the two-tier system was built on—dissension—just so they can separate us, and they successfully did it. GM is playing for keeps right now, and every time we go to the bargaining table, they permanently take something away from us and give us back something we already had, and the UAW calls it a great victory."

He noted that many workers at Factory Zero are now eyeing the exits. "A lot of people are planning on transferring. There's no stability. It seems like they're welcoming people to leave—they want to get down to a skeleton crew. So, they like the uncomfortable, and we don't."

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Will Lehman: Workers must not pay for the crimes of management and Trump

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and candidate for UAW president running on a program of transferring power to rank-and-file committees, called the new round of layoffs at GM's Factory Zero a direct consequence of management's subordination of production to Wall Street profits, compounded by Trump's war of annihilation against Iran.

"Workers at Factory Zero are not responsible for the economic crisis being exacerbated by Trump's criminal war against Iran, nor for the shortsighted decisions of management, which are primarily concerned with enriching stockholders and corporate executives," Lehman said.

He said workers at Factory Zero and other plants should build rank-and-file committees that would enforce a zero-layoff policy and the return of all laid-off workers to their jobs. "When production is slowed, workers' hours should be cut with no loss of pay. Automation, artificial intelligence, and other technologies should be used to lessen the burden of work and sharply increase workers' living standards—not throw them into the streets."

Lehman placed the crisis squarely in the context of capitalist production for profit. "GM is spending billions on executive salaries, stock buybacks and its new headquarters in downtown Detroit while workers are thrown out of their jobs," he said. "The company had adjusted profits of $12.7 billion for 2025, following record profits of $14.9 billion in 2024. GM stock has risen approximately 55 percent over the past year, and the company spent $6 billion on stock buybacks for their wealthy investors. Workers produced that wealth. They should not be sacrificed to further enrich shareholders."

Lehman was scathing in his denunciation of UAW President Shawn Fain and the broader union bureaucracy for their silence in the face of layoffs at Factory Zero and at GM and Ford electric battery plants across Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. "The UAW apparatus has not called a single membership meeting, organized a single protest, or issued a single concrete demand to stop these layoffs," Lehman said. "The bureaucracy's silence is not passivity—it is complicity."

He reserved particular condemnation for Fain's embrace of Trump's nationalist economic agenda. "The chauvinist nationalism of Fain and the UAW apparatus aligns them directly with Trump," Lehman said. "By blaming 'unfair trade' and pitting American workers against their brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico and around the world, the UAW bureaucracy functions as a tool of the very corporations that are destroying workers' livelihoods."

"The fight of Mexican workers against the transnational auto corporations is our fight. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is building the unity of American, Canadian and Mexican workers against these corporations, and that is the only program that can actually defend jobs."

Lehman stressed that his campaign for UAW president is aimed not at a changing of the guard within the current bureaucratic apparatus but at transferring genuine power to workers on the shop floor. "This campaign is about waging a relentless fight against capitalism, which subordinates every decision—what to produce, how to produce it, who works and who doesn't—to the needs of corporate owners. That has to end. The transformation of the auto industry, including the shift to electric vehicles and the use of automation and AI, must be placed under democratic workers' control and reorganized to meet social needs, not the further enrichment of wealthy shareholders. The squandering of trillions on war and destruction must end and society's resources used to raise the material and cultural conditions of all working people."

Wave of manufacturing layoffs

The crisis at Factory Zero is unfolding within the broader context of an accelerating collapse of manufacturing employment across the United States in 2026. More than 100,000 American manufacturing workers have lost their jobs since Trump entered office, driven by a combination of AI-driven restructuring, tariff-related economic uncertainty and corporate decisions to offshore production.

In the automotive sector alone, Ford laid off all 1,600 employees at its electric vehicle battery plant in Glendale, Kentucky, announcing plans to convert the facility for battery production for data centers rather than vehicles.

Whirlpool has laid off approximately 350 workers at its Amana, Iowa factory producing refrigerators under several brand names, having cut the plant's workforce by more than half in recent years as production shifted to Mexico. Dow Chemical announced plans to cut approximately 4,500 jobs as part of a restructuring aimed at accelerating automation and AI integration. Semiconductor firms ams OSRAM and ASML cut 2,000 and 1,700 workers respectively. Food and beverage manufacturers, forest products companies, dental supply firms, and biotech manufacturers have all announced plant closures and mass layoffs in early 2026.

Automation is being weaponized to lay off workers across entire sectors, as workers are being made to pay for a looming economic crisis. Companies like Ford—converting an EV battery plant into a data center facility—exemplify the instability of the supply chain that the UAW once celebrated as the foundation of a "just transition to EVs."

Factory Zero was inaugurated with fanfare in 2021 after GM invested $2.2 billion retooling the former Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly plant. President Biden visited for a test drive of the electric Hummer. UAW leaders proclaimed a bright future. Less than four years later, the plant has been cut to a single shift, laid off repeatedly, and now sits idle again. The UAW, which pledged to defend jobs in the transition to electric vehicles, has offered workers nothing but platitudes and silence.

As the veteran Factory Zero worker who has navigated seven GM plants over his two-decade career put it: "GM is playing for keeps right now." The workers of Factory Zero—and the hundreds of thousands of manufacturing workers across the country facing similar conditions—need an organization that plays for keeps on their behalf.

That requires breaking from the UAW bureaucracy, building independent rank-and-file committees and advancing a program that places workers' needs above the demands of shareholders and corporate executives.

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