Ford announces new investments at Kentucky Truck Plant, amid White House pressure to decouple from Chinese supply chains

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Earlier this month, Ford announced a $1 billion investment in a new paint shop at its Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP), presenting it as a triumph of “American manufacturing.” The new facility will replace the existing paint shop as part of a broader modernization of the plant. But the investment is being made within a restructuring of the entire auto industry in which new technology and capital spending are being used to raise productivity and cut costs, while workers face layoffs, plant closures and speedup.

Ford says the new paint shop will use upgraded technology to deliver “cleaner and more efficient paint quality” and “improved efficiency,” with groundbreaking expected by the end of this year. The company has not announced a completion date, capacity target or staffing changes tied specifically to the project. The Kentucky Truck Plant, which builds the F-Series Super Duty trucks, the Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator, is Ford’s largest and highest-revenue US manufacturing plant. It employed about 8,900 workers as of June, more than 8,300 of them hourly.

The investment comes as Ford is already pushing more production at KTP. Last October the company announced another $60 million for training and other changes aimed at increasing the Super Duty assembly-line speed by one job per hour. Ford said this would produce more than 5,000 additional trucks a year with the addition of just over 100 workers. A vehicle already rolls off KTP’s lines roughly every 45 seconds.

The investment is one node in a global restructuring whose costs are being imposed on the working class. Since 2022, Ford has announced or carried out roughly 14,000 job cuts across North America, Europe and India, including 3,000 salaried and contract positions largely in North America and India. Successive European restructuring programs eliminated 7,800 jobs and roughly 3,500 jobs at its Saarlouis plant in Germany.

Across the world auto industry, Nissan is eliminating 20,000 jobs and closing seven plants, while Volkswagen is preparing up to 100,000 job cuts as part of the largest restructuring in its history.

The shift to electric vehicles is a key part of this restructuring. In March 2022, Ford split its EV and combustion-engine operations into separate businesses—”Model e” for electric vehicles and “Ford Blue” for combustion—pledging tens of billions of dollars to the EV push.

At the nearby Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP), Ford is spending roughly $2 billion to convert the factory to build a midsize electric pickup on its Universal EV Platform beginning in 2027. Ford says the new system will use 20 percent fewer parts, 40 percent fewer assembly stations and ultimately cut assembly time by 15 percent. The company says LAP will have the highest level of automation in final assembly of any Ford plant globally.

The restructuring is bound up with an escalating conflict over China, technology and supply chains. Ford’s press release, trumpeting its “commitment to American manufacturing,” landed two days after Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy sent CEO Jim Farley a letter expressing “profound concern” over the automaker’s ties to Chinese companies, particularly the battery supplier CATL. Ford dismissed the letter as a “wrongheaded attempt to capture headlines.” Trump later intervened to declare Ford a “GREAT American company.”

Duffy is demanding that Ford accelerate the reduction of its dependence on Chinese technology and production, attacking its CATL licensing arrangement, ties to Chinese automakers Geely and BYD and continued production of the Lincoln Nautilus in China.

The dispute, however, turns on the pace and method of a shared drive to confront China. Ford cannot abruptly sever its links to Chinese technology and supply chains without disrupting production, while Washington is seeking to force a faster reorganization of those supply chains around the strategic requirements of US imperialism.

China’s position in critical auto supply chains sharply limits any rapid decoupling. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), China accounted in 2024 for 91 percent of global refining of magnet rare earths and 94 percent of sintered permanent-magnet production.

The United States has begun expanding domestic separation and magnet capacity, but the IEA says magnet production remains the principal bottleneck in diversification. The extraordinary state support being poured into the sector—including Pentagon financing and guaranteed price floors—underscores that the reorganization of these supply chains is bound up with preparations for economic and military conflict.

Trump abandoned the Biden administration’s EV targets, revoking its nonbinding 2030 sales goal on his first day back in office, while legislation signed in 2025 ended the $7,500 federal tax credit for new EVs on September 30 of that year. The reversal compounded the upheaval in the Detroit automakers’ plans. GM cut Factory Zero in Detroit-Hamtramck to a single shift and later temporarily laid off another 1,300 workers there, while Ford cut F-150 Lightning production at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center to one shift in 2024.

At the same time, tariffs and restrictions on Chinese vehicles and technology—building on the 100 percent tariff on Chinese EVs imposed under Biden and expanded under Trump—are being used to reorganize production under the banner of “national security” and “American manufacturing.”

The union bureaucracy is an active partner in trade war. Days after the Ford announcement, UAW President Shawn Fain and Michigan Democratic US Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed delivered anti-Chinese tirades at a UAW conference, attacking Trump from the right for suggesting he would permit Chinese-owned US plants.

Fain called Chinese-owned production “a slap in the face to America” and invoked the slander of Chinese “slave labor,” while El-Sayed declared, “If I’m the Big Three right now, I’m pissed off as hell at Donald Trump.” Fain has called for converting auto plants to produce “tanks and planes and bombs,” and GM Defense is already working with Lockheed Martin on missile components.

The bureaucracy is reviving the ugliest traditions in UAW history—the “Buy American” campaigns and its smashing of Japanese cars of the late 1970s that formed the background to the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American draftsman beaten to death by a Chrysler foreman and a laid-off autoworker.

The purpose of this nationalism is to tell autoworkers that they share a common interest with the corporations that are restructuring production at their expense, and to redirect opposition away from Ford and against workers in China.

In reality, KTP workers face stagnating wages, rising line speeds, unsafe conditions and a union apparatus that has colluded with management at every step. A financial audit of UAW Local 862 documented large, unexplained salary increases for top officials, while one worker told the WSWS that her rent had risen by $1,000 a month since 2017 and that she still lived paycheck to paycheck. Workers have also said they cannot afford the vehicles they manufacture. Workers have reported sewage on the production line, random bag searches, and a worker who suffered nine spinal fractures because his safety complaints were ignored for three years.

The trade war is an inter-imperialist conflict in which the working class has no interest. The “national security” rhetoric is a cover for American imperialism’s aggressive assertion against its Chinese rival—preparation for war, not the defense of jobs.

The workers at the Kentucky Truck Plant have no stake in this fight. Their interests lie in the international unity of American, Chinese and all workers. The billions being spent on “modernization” belong to them, not to the corporate boards and union bureaucrats who serve only profit.

This requires rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW apparatus, uniting workers across plants, companies and borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)—the embryo of a new working-class movement.

Autoworkers must fight for: no layoffs or plant closures; full income and benefits for all affected; international unity against the trade war and the drive to war; and the socialist reorganization of the auto industry under public ownership and workers’ control. This is the only answer to the nationalist poison of “American manufacturing.”