

“People are working two to three Saturdays in a row and they are laying people off”

Anger mounting among US autoworkers in wake of GM layoff announcement

By Shannon Jones
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Frustration and stress is mounting in General Motors plants in the wake of the mass layoff announcement last week by the largest US-based automaker.

On December 19, GM said it would eliminate one full shift, almost 1,300 jobs, at its Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant in March. In addition it said it would idle five plants for one to three weeks in January, impacting some 10,000 workers.

In November, GM reported plans to eliminate shifts at its Lordstown, Ohio plant and Lansing Grand River plant in Michigan, impacting some 2,000 workers. In reporting the cuts GM cited excess inventories and slower sales. The layoffs, however, are coming at a time when many plants are imposing forced overtime.

The United Auto Workers has given its support to the job cuts, taking the position that the mass layoffs are a business necessity. In a statement issued in the wake of the job cut announcement UAW Local 22 at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant justified the cuts on the grounds of “cost efficiency.”

Hardest hit by the layoffs will be young workers, many of who are on long-term temporary assignment and do not qualify to be placed at other GM facilities. Many are also being deprived of supplemental unemployment benefits, which pay a portion of the difference between their state jobless benefits and their regular wages. Most of the workers facing layoff were hired in April of 2016. That means the layoffs were timed so that these workers will have less than the one-year seniority required to receive supplemental unemployment pay and other benefits.

A young GM worker at the GM Detroit-Hamtramck

plant, who wished to remain anonymous, told the *World Socialist Web Site* she had previously worked for a GM subcontractor, but could not carry that seniority with her. “It sucks. They said they would see if they will transfer us to either Lake Orion or Romulus, but it is not a promise.”

Andrew, another young GM Detroit-Hamtramck second shift worker who faces layoff, said, “A guy who works near me quit a job at FedEx in Cleveland because he thought working at GM would be a more secure job.

“Out of the 1,300 that are being laid off, only about 300 are permanent employees. The rest are temporary and that means they can’t move to another plant. You are out of a job, and we don’t get sub pay.

“What is also upsetting is the uncertainty. I could be out of a job for a year. Do I start looking for a new job or hope to go back to work at GM?”

He continued, “The health insurance part is major. I am only getting one extra month of health insurance. My wife went off her health insurance plan at the job she was working so she could be covered under my plan at GM, which was better. But now she can’t get back on her old plan until November. Meanwhile, she has major medical expenses.”

Under terms of the UAW-GM sellout national agreement signed in 2015, the number of temporary workers that can be hired by management was doubled. This has created a super-exploited, “third tier” of workers who can essentially be hired and fired at will by the company.

A veteran worker at the GM Delta Township plant

near Lansing told the WSWS, “The majority of those being laid off are temporary workers. The shift they are eliminating at the Grand River plant are new hires. They will be coming over here to Delta and they will displace the temporary workers.

“We have temporary workers who work very hard. A lot of them quit other jobs to come work for GM where they thought they could get a foot in the door. They have made purchases and they have bills. In fact we just brought in another 100 temps the week before Thanksgiving.

“We call them ‘perma-temps.’ You can have them in there for years. It is not right. The decision should be made to hire them full time after 90 days.”

Workers pointed to the contradiction of GM insisting that it must slash jobs and production even as it has forced workers to labor extra hours and on weekends in order to build up inventory.

The Delta Township worker commented, “People are working two to three Saturdays in a row and they are laying people off. People are overworked. It is not right. It has got to stop.”

A worker from Ford's assembly plant in Wayne, Michigan said her factory had been impacted by layoffs. “I think it's horrible what they're doing. We have no rights. We were laid off for a week before Christmas from December 12 through the 19, and we will be off in February for another one or two weeks. They say it's due to a slump in sales, yet they'll work us 10 to 12 hours a day to boost production just so they can lay us off.”

Workers also focused on the role of the UAW in facilitating the attack on jobs. Andrew, the Detroit-Hamtramck GM worker, said, “The UAW comes around once in a while. They claim they did not know in advance about the layoffs, but I find that hard to believe.”

The former GM subcontract worker said, “When they made the announcement there was not one UAW person on the stage to answer questions. Their position is basically you are out the door, ‘goodbye.’”

The Delta Township worker noted the fact that the UAW was one of the largest holders of GM stock. “They signed off on the decision to move small car production to Mexico, even though it would hurt jobs.

“The UAW has allowed GM to amend a lot of the old contracts in order to help the company make money.

What the union isn't saying is that it is in the interest of the union itself so that it doesn't drive their stock down.

“A couple of years ago the union decided to raise union dues, saying there would be a big strike and they needed money for the strike fund. The strike never happened, but they did not lower the dues. Instead they gave themselves raises.”

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