

General Motors worker on job cuts: “This is all about corporate greed”

Detroit-Hamtramck autoworkers want to fight against plant closures

By our reporters
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More than 1,500 General Motors autoworkers at the Detroit-Hamtramck Plant in Michigan returned from a Thanksgiving break on Tuesday. It was their first shift since the announcement by GM executives that it intends to close the plant next year.

Monday’s announcement is part of a global restructuring by the US-based auto giant. More than 14,700 jobs are to be destroyed and seven plants closed, including four in the United States, one in Canada, and another two outside of North America that are yet to be named.

Workers came off 10- and 11-hour shifts and expressed their outrage over the announcement and their contempt for the United Autoworkers (UAW), which did not even bother to turn up at the plant to answer workers’ questions about the closure on the first shift since the announcement. The UAW, which functions as an arm of corporate management for the auto bosses and Wall Street shareholders, has made clear it will do nothing to oppose the onslaught on workers’ jobs.

“We have not heard a word from them,” said one worker. Sharon, who has been in the paint department for a decade, said, “They definitely knew before yesterday. They knew. I thought it was going to be a layoff coming because of rumors going around since June last year. We didn’t get a new car model to produce. I didn’t think it would be a closure.”

Another worker commented, “With the union and the company it is all hush-hush.”

“I’ve been working for 34 years and I’ve had to hear about this closure and my layoff from my sister in Florida,” said Frank. “They didn’t even have the decency to tell us they were putting us out of a job.

These people, the auto companies and the bureaucrats, they were bailed out by the government. We took concessions. And now what? Who’s going to bail the workers out? Wall Street? This is all about corporate greed. They never cared about us, even when they were sweet talking us and selling us the concessions.”

Sharon said she thought the announcement was “some kind of intimidation” by the company. “The contract is coming up. They’re saying: if you want the plant to stay open, you have to accept this. My co-workers have been talking, and we all think it’s something like that. Why now? Why at Christmas? This is terrible. But the contract is coming up.”

The closure would further devastate the Detroit area, already one of the poorest big cities in the country. “I’ve been here 14 years,” said Joyce. “I’ll be laid off and would have to find something at a different plant. I’ve got two daughters. It’s been rough these last 13 years. They were minors when I started here so I had to make the decision to work here to take care of my children.”

Another worker commented that he was laid off from his previous job just five years ago. “I have experience to leverage to get a job somewhere else,” he said, “but the younger workers—they have kids and roots. It’s much harder for them to pick up their lives and leave.”

Sharon has two kids in their 20s who are financially independent, but also has two grandchildren, six and seven years old, whom she cares for in addition to her 70-year-old mother. “It’s going to be really tough,” she said. “I need the work and the check every week. I’m single.”

Those workers who are being offered new positions are being told they must accept positions either in Flint,

Michigan, or in Texas. “I’m going to try to transfer,” Sharon said, “but they want you to just pick up and go. They don’t care about us. They call and offer you a job in Texas and if you turn it down it’s ‘bye bye.’”

A number of workers commented on the ruthless actions of corporate management. “When you go into GM, behind those doors, it’s like a whole other city,” Joyce said. “You have no say in what happens, in what you do. They tell you nothing until the last minute. They tell you it’s a democratic thing, but it’s more like a dictatorship.”

“Obama gave them [the auto companies] money to bail them out” in 2009, said Jesse, who works at the nearby Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly Plant and spoke to WSWS reporters at a pizza shop across the road from the GM assembly. “And what are they doing with the money they received?”

“The grassroots people that are making the parts, that are in the trenches doing the work, and not in the boardroom, you’ve pulled the rug out from under their table, and now they can’t put food on it for their families.” The workers cannot “put their kids in college” or “pay for medical.” He said there are workers “who are diabetic, and you know medical bills for that are astronomical. They [the auto bosses] are just thinking about money, and not with their hearts.”

Workers are endlessly told that they must “sacrifice” for the good of the economy—in reality, to further inflate the wealth of the rich. Jesse said, “We’ve got nothing left to sacrifice. So they can have their third home? We don’t have vacation homes and multiple cars.” Workers have “one car we share with our wives or girlfriends, and for taking our kids to school. And you’ve got women who are single mothers working in auto factories, who can’t even pay daycare because there’s not enough money.”

As for the UAW, Jesse said “it has gotten so bad now” that “the union has basically turned into political senators and congressmen. They promise you something, and then they take it back. They’ve taken a note from these politicians.”

Sharon commented on the response by President Trump to the General Motors announcement. Trump, the billionaire con-artist, has sought to exploit widespread anger over the big business policies of the Obama administration, inequality and mass layoffs in a reactionary nationalist direction, blaming foreign

workers for the social devastation caused by capitalism.

“Trump is trying to act like he’s helping us, and saying it’s workers in other countries,” Sharon said. “I’m not a fan of his. But I think they want us workers to be against each other in different countries. We should all be united together.”

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