

Lordstown, Ohio workers condemn GM's planned factory closures

By our reporters
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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding an emergency meeting this Sunday, December 9 at 2 p.m. in Detroit to organize a fight against the plant closures. We urge all autoworkers to make plans to attend and organize delegations from your factories. Let us know you are attending and share the event on Facebook with your friends and co-workers.

General Motors workers remain angry over the company's plans to shut five factories in the US and Canada by the end of 2019 and eliminate nearly 15,000 hourly and salaried workers' jobs. Workers in Lordstown, Ohio expressed their determination to fight the closure in comments to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* on Wednesday.

Workers at the plant and in the surrounding area spoke out even as GM CEO Mary Barra was meeting with members of Congress to hash out a plan for neutralizing opposition to the company's plant closures in Lordstown, Detroit, Baltimore and Oshawa, Ontario.

The Lordstown announcement is only the latest blow for workers in the Mahoning Valley, an area which is still known as Steel Valley due to the once abundant steel mills and related manufacturing. However, since the September 19, 1977 announcement of the closure of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, a day inscribed in workers' memories as "Black Monday," the Mahoning Valley, which includes Lordstown, Warren and Youngstown, has lost nearly one-fifth of its population.

With one mill closure after the next through the end of the 1980s, the region lost approximately 40,000 manufacturing jobs, devastating the economy. As an outcome of continuing deindustrialization, the area is today an epicenter in the nationwide opioid overdose crisis.

Autoworkers and residents report that the closure of

the Lordstown plant, which manufactures the Chevrolet Cruze and has been in operation since 1966, would have a devastating impact on an area which has already been hit hard by decades of deindustrialization. Many in the region have a mother, an uncle, a sister or a cousin who will be put of work by the closure of the area's largest industrial employer.

Sam has worked on the assembly line at the GM plant for almost 18 years. "My wife has had a career as a grade school teacher here for 17 years," he said. "Her family is here. If we have to leave for a different GM plant, she'll lose it all. I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't.

"This area would be devastated if it closes," Sam noted. "When we were running three shifts this was our biggest employer; this place once employed 15,000 people.

"It's just greedy. They made \$ 8.5 billion in the last three quarters. I'm sure Mary Barra will get her cut. And the UAW is just frustrating. I've heard things about the payments they received from Chrysler, and that whole cabin up in Black Lake for [former UAW President] Dennis Williams.

"We had a lot of workers who got screwed here with what happened in 2009," he said, referring to the Obama's administration's bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler. "They made more of us temps. They promised we would get it all back but, of course, it never happens. I'm sure our pensions are going to be on the chopping block come contract time. It seems like they put the plants against one another. It would be good to have a committee of workers, so we could have more say."

"They say they are closing because this is a small car plant, but there must be alternatives," declared another Lordstown autoworker, who asked to remain

anonymous.

He criticized the role of the UAW in enforcing concessions and facilitating layoffs. “It’s always ‘more concessions, more concessions.’ What we have left in terms of health care is garbage. There are more copays than anything else. Something is very messed up.”

The worker also spoke about the revelation that the UAW was building a luxury cabin for former President Dennis Williams. “That pisses me off. They are hiring workers at the Black Lake resort to fix the golf course and we are losing our jobs here in Lordstown.”

James, a retired maintenance worker who had worked in machine shops throughout the region, said the closure would trigger a “domino effect, not just in one area, it’s going to cover the entire Mahoning Valley. When I came to Youngstown in 1967 there were 15,000 to 20,000 people working at the GM plant. I’ve seen a lot of change all over this valley. We had machine shops all over the place and now it’s just dried up.”

“We have to do something about it, you can’t just sit idly by and let it flow. Workers can fight it, we have to try to something. You should voice your opinion about what’s going on.”

James noted that companies like GM have no concern for the wellbeing of workers; instead, “it’s all about profit, profit, profit.”

Ronn stocks shelves at a Walmart in Austintown, an area between the Lordstown and Youngstown. “I’ve been sharing a lot of stuff about GM over the past week on Facebook,” he said. “I think it’s a bunch of nonsense. Obama gave them all this money. Then they close these plants.

“Now 14,000 people are about to lose their jobs. I have two kids, one of them just turned 19. The other is 12. I worry about their futures. There’s nothing around here unless you want \$9 an hour at the Dollar Tree [discount store]. There’s going to be a lot more theft. There are so many people overdosing on opioids in Trumbull County.”

He continued, “I’ve been at Walmart for 20 years and I’m making \$15.50 an hour. Isn’t that crazy? If it wasn’t for my wife, it would be tough. This country is in a terrible state. I don’t know. I think we’re definitely going to have some kind of uprising. We’ve been at war in Iraq and Afghanistan and other places

for more than 15 years and it has all been about oil.”

Ronn said he thought it would make sense if workers ran society instead of the rich. “If you get someone that’s actually been working from the bottom, you know what life is really like, not like some guy that drives around a million-dollar car. Doug McKellan, the Walmart CEO, makes us work on Thanksgiving. We know damn well he isn’t here pushing trolleys in the cold like us. He’s at home with his McLaren sports car and I’m driving a GM Malibu I can’t afford.

“It would be nice not to be worked halfway to death,” he added. “The rich could retire now and be fine for the rest of their life. I’ll have to work until I’m 70, get something that won’t be enough, and probably work until I die.”

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