

Ford planning temporary layoffs at Chicago Stamping Plant

By Marcus Day
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Ford Motor Company is planning to temporarily lay off 270 workers at its stamping plant in suburban Chicago Heights, out of a total hourly workforce of just 1,180.

Rumors of layoffs have been swirling at the plant for some time, but workers were not informed by the company until last week. Matt Kolanowski, chairman of UAW Local 588, which covers the plant, posted a notice to the local's mobile app Friday stating, "The Lay Off is 5 weeks starting 1-27. Put your cards in by Tuesday 5am. Go..."

A worker at the plant told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that Ford would be soliciting volunteers for the layoffs first, "but if they don't get their numbers then they go to temps and low seniority to achieve the number, which is 270." He added, "But yet Ford is spending 3 million to renovate the front offices."

The layoffs at Chicago Stamping further discredit the UAW's hollow promises of a "pathway" to full-time employment for temporary workers. Under the deliberately confusing and loophole-riddled scheme, temporary *full-time* workers at Ford (not temporary part-time, a separate category) will only be up for conversion in 2020 if they have worked over three years continuously, with no interruptions to employment longer than 30 days.

Thus, temps who are laid off at Chicago Stamping, even if only for five weeks, will have start over from the bottom, their hope of full-time employment pushed years into the future.

Ford joins General Motors in beginning the new year with job cuts. Earlier this month, GM quietly initiated layoffs of 240 temporary workers at its Fort Wayne Assembly Plant in Indiana.

In 2019, the UAW held up the mirage of regular, full-time employment for temps, combined with false

claims of ending the pay and benefit tier system and retaining job security, to secure passage of the sellout contracts at the Detroit Three. The union was in the midst of an ever-widening corruption scandal gripping its top leadership and was desperate to find some means of preventing a total revolt by autoworkers, who have seen their jobs and living standards eviscerated at the hands of the companies and unions over the last 40 years.

For their part, the auto giants have been engaged in a years-long effort to transform their workforces into part-time, temporary, "gig" employees with essentially no job security, low pay, and few benefits. As Kristin Dziczek of the industry-aligned Center for Automotive Research noted in a recent presentation praising the 2019 contracts, the automakers "like contingent work, that is temporary work, the ability to flex the workforce and have people who they can lay off without any costs."

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* warned upon the first release of General Motors' tentative agreement that the much-lauded "pathway" for temps would "be worthless, since there will be nothing to stop the company from laying off part-timers to prevent them from meeting the requirement of a certain number of years of consecutive work. The real purpose of this provision will be to allow GM to rapidly expand part-time and temp labor at the expense of full-time jobs."

The layoffs at the stamping plant, which feeds the larger Chicago Assembly Plant on the city's Far South Side, are provoking anger among workers, particularly as the company spends money on office renovation.

"Contractors already came in to bid for the front offices," the worker said. "It was confirmed by the union that it's being done and that the cost is 3 million.

They may be doing it while we're laid off in an effort to save money and not have to pay overtime, per contractual language.”

“Workers are angry at how many UAW executives have been charged and given next-to-nothing sentences while the members suffer from the financial loss,” the worker said. “We have lost a lot of little perks due to their theft. The contract was and is weak and now we'll never get anything back we gave up in 2011. Meanwhile, we're threatened with layoffs and uncertainty.

“The local union preaches how we're lucky with the contract we got,” he continued. “They also keep posting about the UAW executives and how they're happy they were caught, but that's just an effort to distance themselves. A few [local officials] have made their own deals to increase their pay which caused seven electricians to lose their jobs and be absorbed by CAP [the nearby Chicago Assembly Plant].

“They're no different than the executives, just on a smaller level.”

Workers must prepare now in order to fight back against the next wave of restructuring and jobs cuts which are in the offing. New organizations, rank-and-file factory committees, are required and must be independent of the UAW, which is a bribed tool of management.

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