

More than half of jobs on the chopping block at GM's Brownstown Battery Plant

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By the end of June, 183 jobs will be cut at General Motors' Brownstown Battery plant, leaving only 107 workers at the plant. Workers with seniority rights have been told they will be able to transfer to other plants; temporary workers have no transfer rights. Like many promises made under the United Auto Workers contracts, however, even these transfers are far from guaranteed.

Located south of Detroit in the Downriver area, the plant produces batteries for combustion vehicles and for electric vehicles (EV), including the GM Cruise, which is made at the Lake Orion plant north of Detroit, and the electric Hummer, made at Factory Zero in Hamtramck, an enclave of Detroit. Brownstown also plays a role in the Cruise Autonomous Vehicle (AV), responsible, with roof module production, for all of Cruise's self-driving vehicles.

The job cuts come during the eruption of a crisis within the UAW bureaucracy. On June 9, the federal monitor in charge of overseeing the UAW bureaucracy issued a status report revealing that it is conducting a growing investigation into the administration of UAW President Shawn Fain for the misuse of union resources.

Since then, heated correspondence between Shawn Fain and Rich Boyer, the union's vice president for Stellantis, recently demoted by Fain, has revealed that they both knew of the planned termination of thousands of Stellantis temporary workers under the new contract, which the union has falsely hailed as an historic victory following a limited "standup strike" which did not seriously impact auto production.

In order to get the contract ratified, temp workers were promised full-time status. Thousands of them have since been fired.

The workers at Brownstown are employees of GM Subsystems, a subsidiary formerly on a separate UAW contract with a lower pay scale. When the facility opened in 2010, it served the ends of super-exploitation by GM and a source of dues revenue for the UAW.

Over many years, several efforts by Brownstown rank-and-file workers to improve their conditions have been sabotaged by the UAW. The starting wage 14 years ago was just \$13 an hour, with top pay of \$14.85.

A former Brownstown worker told the WSWS:

In 2015 we voted 100 percent for strike action, but the union would not call us out. Instead, we were told to wait because no contract could be signed until the national agreement was settled. Then, after the national agreement was ratified, the union told us if we went on strike we would be on our own. We were forced out of striking.

Only under the new contract have GM Subsystems workers finally been brought under the main national agreement. But the layoffs at Brownstown show that, like promises to temp workers, this was a ploy to get the contract passed.

The subsystems workers were promised substantial wage increases and were allowed to vote on the national contract, which they were not yet covered by, in order to use their votes to ensure contract ratification in the face of substantial opposition, particularly from the assembly plants.

Workers have reported that all of the temp workers who were transferred to Brownstown from a pool in January of this year will be terminated, including some who are just shy of their 9 months to qualify for full-time status.

A Brownstown worker told the WSWS:

We voted for the contract because, for example, I went from only making \$16.50 an hour after three years of working here to \$30 an hour today. Before being brought under the National Agreement, we were capped at \$23.00 an hour after six years. Reading about the investigation into the UAW, now I think they knew the jobs would be cut, but I think they kept it quiet, because it was the only way they could pass the contract.

Before the layoffs, from January until May, the Brownstown plant was running 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As the Brownstown worker explained, “We were working like crazy, and then between April and May, EV sales slumped. Then, the slowdown came and we get tossed out.”

The mounting attacks on jobs are part of a broader jobs bloodbath in the industry’s transition to electric vehicle production. An estimated 40 percent of autoworkers’ jobs will be eliminated in the US and internationally in the transition to EV production.

The current sales slump in both EV and combustion vehicles is caused by high prices, high interest rates, the impact of inflation and the lack of infrastructure for charging stations. These factors are being weaponized against workers in an attempt to break down the mounting opposition to low wages, which are rapidly falling behind the cost of living.

Meanwhile, the oligarchs are being rewarded handsomely, including Elon Musk, who received a \$45 billion payout from the Tesla board of directors after cutting 10 percent of the electric carmaker’s global workforce.

Automakers have demanded that Michigan state officials essentially subsidize the costly transition to electric vehicles. In 2022, Michigan’s Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer allocated \$2 billion to the

Big Three automakers to subsidize the transition to EV production. The promise was to create 12,000 jobs, which itself is a pittance.

But a recent investigation by *Bridge* magazine revealed that only 200 jobs have been created so far. According to the report:

Michigan has spent \$1 billion in corporate incentives and pledged hundreds of millions more for major electric-vehicle and battery projects that so far have created about 200 jobs.

Whitmer announced the companies would invest \$16 billion total and create 12,000 jobs. But all the projects are behind schedule and two have downsized, reducing best-case job expectations by 13 percent.

In addition to the \$2 billion subsidy, the Whitmer administration has shoveled hundreds of millions of dollars in tax cuts and incentives into the coffers of the auto bosses, while the population has suffered devastating cuts in K-12 education and social programs. The automakers have decades-long tax credit arrangements in place. GM, for example, will net as much as \$2.28 billion in tax savings through the end of 2029.



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