

Largest employer in Juniata County, Pennsylvania to close, costing 420 workers their jobs

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Cabinetworks Group announced on September 17 that it will close its Thompsontown factory in central Pennsylvania this December, laying off 420 workers. The Cabinetworks factory, part of the company's Master Woodcraft Cabinetry unit, is the largest employer in Juniata County as of the first quarter of 2024, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor Relations.

The news follows an August 6 announcement by Cabinetworks that 20 percent of their staff in Thompsontown would be laid off, as well as a July 15 announcement from the company that their facilities in Marshall, Texas and Jefferson, Texas would be closed, affecting another 350 workers.

Juniata County itself, located just northwest of Harrisburg, the state capital, is one of the least-populated counties in Pennsylvania, with approximately 23,500 residents. Thompsontown and nearby Delaware Township, where the Cabinetworks factory is situated, have populations of only 631 and 1,610, respectively.

Cabinetworks CEO Jeff Jackson has stated that the planned closure was due to “deteriorating market conditions” resulting in the company's “exit” of the multi-family direct sales segment of the business, and “retirement” of all product lines manufactured therein.

A company statement published in *Woodworking Network* notes “The multi-family housing sector has faced prolonged challenges, including significant year-over-year declines in housing starts which are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.”

The Thompsontown layoffs are therefore connected to more profound economic causes: the rampant housing market speculation bubble—a primary driver of

the crisis in affordable housing affecting working people—is collapsing, thus leading to a subsequent collapse of the building product manufacturing industry.

Cabinetworks, the United States' largest privately owned cabinet manufacturer with 8,000 employees in total, has been owned by Platinum Equity, an investment firm founded by multi-billionaire Tom Gores, since May 2021. Gores, net worth \$9.1 billion, is the owner of the Detroit Pistons professional basketball franchise and has a 24 percent stake in the San Diego Chargers football team. He is a previous owner of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* newspaper.

The *Woodworking Network* article notes that CabinetWorks “plans to work with the local union and its Thompsontown employees” in winding down the operation in Thompsontown. That the Carpenters and Joiners union is working with Cabinetworks to “help” its soon-to-be former employees in job training and résumé drafting is of little use, as the closure will impact the largest employer in the county. The job losses will have ripple effects across numerous other businesses and industries in the area, ultimately costing other workers their jobs.

Rather than organize an industrial counteroffensive against the planned shutdown, union officials have capitulated and are facilitating these layoffs in the interest of the company.

Neither Donald Trump nor Kamala Harris, the Republican and Democratic nominees for President of the United States respectively, made a single mention of the pending Thompsontown layoffs during their dozens of campaign stops in the swing state of Pennsylvania. This was despite the fact both candidates

campaigned extensively in Central Pennsylvania specifically, since the initial June 15 layoff announcement.

The Thompsett closure is another in a string of plant closures and layoffs throughout Pennsylvania and more broadly. This includes the impending closure of a PepsiCo bottling plant in Harrisburg, affecting 127 workers; the June 2023 closure of Homer City Generating Station in Center Township, affecting 129 workers; and the planned closure of an Anchor Hocking plant in Charleroi affecting more than 300 workers. Pennsylvania has ultimately lost hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs since 2001, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

This is part of a national and international wave of mass layoffs. Stellantis workers were just informed that 1,130 workers at the automaker's Toledo Assembly Complex will be laid off on January 5. This follows the layoff of more than 1,000 workers in the first phase of as many as 2,400 workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in Detroit, Michigan last month. General Motors has announced layoffs at its Fairfax Assembly plant in St. Louis, Missouri and is firing hundreds of temporary workers. Ford is also laying off 800 workers at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, Michigan.

Volkswagen has announced the closure of plants and firing of thousands of workers in Germany.

Last month, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWARFC) issued a statement that said “[the] campaign against layoffs must be on a world scale because every industry operates using globalized production and supply chains. There is no such thing anymore as a ‘German’ or ‘American’ car. Instead, modern vehicles are a product of the coordinated labor of workers in dozens of countries, regardless of whether the corporate headquarters are in Wolfsburg or Detroit.”

The layoffs in Pennsylvania prove that this struggle must be expanded to all sections of the working class.



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