GM installs robots at flagship EV factory after laying off 1,300 workers

Dozens of new robot arms have been installed at General Motors' flagship electric vehicle factory in Detroit—even as 1,300 workers remain out of work following what was supposed to be a temporary layoff. The latest automation push has spurred union pushback over a potentially existential issue for automakers and their workers.

General Motors installed approximately 50 robot arms at GM's Factory Zero plant in Detroit, Michigan, according to reporting by Crain's Detroit Business. Made by the Japanese robotics company FANUC, the robots are designed to help attach various components to vehicles during the assembly line process. But leaders at United Auto Workers (UAW), the primary US union for autoworkers, reacted with anger to the new robotic presence, given how GM has not yet called back any of the workers affected by supposedly temporary layoffs in March.

More than 1,000 union members are still "laid off indefinitely," James Cotton, president of UAW Local 22, told The Detroit News. He said that the company could bring some of those members back to work instead of installing the 50 robots.

The temporary layoffs were preceded by permanent layoffs involving another 1,200 workers at GM's Factory Zero in October 2025.

Many automakers, including Stellantis NV and Ford Motor Company, have deployed assembly-line robots, such as Fanuc

robot arms, as they push to automate more of their US operations. Hyundai Motor Company plans to deploy Atlas humanoid robots made by Boston Dynamics—which Hyundai acquired in 2020—to start working in the automaker's flagship EV facility in Georgia by 2028.

Andrew Bergman, a Local 22 member and union organizer who was among those laid off by GM, described corporate leaders in the automotive industry as prioritizing profits over human workers.

"Technological development has the capability of making work safer for the working class and enabling workers to have a shorter work week without losing pay," Bergman told The Detroit News. "But in the bosses' and billionaires' hands it's used to pad profits and lay off workers."

The Detroit News also highlighted how corporate leaders and workers conveyed "strikingly different messages" about AI, robotics, and automation during separate gatherings held in Detroit during the same week of June.

While the Reindustrialize Summit featured startup founder speeches about how robots could "empower our industrial base with superhuman manufacturing," the UAW Constitutional Convention featured UAW president Shawn Fain warning against "the threat of humanoid robotics and mass automation" undermining worker employment and wages at a time of rising wealth inequality.

https://arstechnica.com/ai/2026/06/gm-installs-robots-at-flagship-ev-factory-after-laying-off-1300-workers/