

Stellantis workers back contract fights at Detroit Diesel and CNH

Jerry White
19 May 2022

With the contract at the Detroit Three automakers only one year away, the World Socialist Web Site urges autoworkers to give their brothers and sisters at Detroit Diesel and CNH the broadest possible support and solidarity. To send in your statements of support, visit wsws.org/contact. All statements will be kept anonymous.

Autoworkers at the Stellantis (Chrysler) Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit expressed their solidarity with workers in contract fights at Detroit Diesel and at CNH farm equipment factories in Iowa and Wisconsin.

Even though Detroit Diesel workers voted by 98 percent to authorize strike action, the UAW has adamantly opposed calling a walkout against the company. On Thursday, UAW Local 631 officials announced they had reached a new deal and would hold a snap vote on it by Tuesday. After workers rejected the last sellout, local union officials warned a new offer would not include any economic improvements over the deal they rejected by 79 percent.

Supporters of the WSWW *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with Stellantis workers during their shift change and distributed a hundreds of copies of the newsletter, which included information about these two critical struggles. Detroit Diesel and CNH workers are members of the United Auto Workers, but the UAW has deliberately kept other union members in the dark about these struggles.

The UAW has maintained a wall of silence because the 1,300 Detroit Diesel workers overwhelmingly voted to reject a union-backed contract proposal, which would have only increased wages by eight percent over six years. CNH workers have been on strike since May 2 to overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions and win substantial improvements in wages, benefits and

working conditions.

Stellantis workers were excited to hear that their fellow workers had taken a stand against the UAW and were pressing ahead to win wage demands to protect their families against surging inflation. In a little more than a year, the labor agreements covering 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers are expiring and workers are also determined to defend their living standards.

“I say keep fighting,” Bill, an autoworker with several years in the plant, said, addressing himself to the Detroit Diesel and CNH workers. “I hope we can get somewhere. We all have to take care of our families. It’s good that workers are fighting back. If we fight together, if we’re all in accord, we can change things.

“A strike is hard,” he added. The CNH workers should “get their full pay” from the UAW, he said because “they still have to feed their families.” Instead the UAW is providing starvation strike benefits of \$275 a week from its \$800 million strike fund, paid for with workers’ dues money.

“Stellantis does what they want,” he said. “The company is making billions off of us. We got a little profit-sharing check but that’s already gone. We have kids in college and other big expenses. We should be making \$34-35 an hour and we should bring back COLA (Cost-of-Living Adjustments).”

Bill referred to the bribery scandal, which involved UAW officials taking millions in payoffs from Chrysler executives in exchange for signing pro-company deals that slashed the wages of new hires and handed other givebacks to the corporation. “They caught them taking bribes. We should have been paid back the money they robbed from us. But that never happened.”

He noted that last year workers at John Deere rejected

several UAW contracts and got COLA back. “They got some things by voting down what the UAW brought back.”

“We’ve got to fight for COLA and stop this tier crap,” a veteran worker told the WSWS. “They’re taking everything from the workers,” she said, referring not only to wages and conditions, but to basic democratic rights. “If they get rid of Roe vs. Wade,” she said, “they’re are going to be a lot of moms dying in back alleys.”

The UAW, she said, had “signed away” decades of gains by workers. When the supporter from the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* pointed out that UAW President Ray Curry sits on the corporate board of Daimler AG, the parent company of Detroit Diesel, she said, “That sounds corrupt.”

“Good for them,” John, another veteran worker said, referring to the stand taken by the Detroit Diesel and CNH workers. “We have the same fight here. The UAW does not enforce the contract. There is supposed to be a 25 percent cap on the number of second-tier workers but it is more like 40 percent at this plant. The lower-tier workers don’t even get a profit-sharing check.

“I hope they get what they want. It’s getting tougher and tougher to make ends meet. Without a fight, we are only going to lose more. We have to increase pensions, get COLA back and eliminate the tiers,” John concluded.

“It’s good that they’re not taking that contract,” a young worker said about the Detroit Diesel workers. “Less than two percent a year is ridiculous. Gas prices are going up, and a raise like that wouldn’t even fill up your tank halfway. They have to keep shooting for more.”

Another young worker added, “Gas is up, groceries are up, and my rent shot up from \$1,050 to \$1,150 every month, but we haven’t gotten any real raises.”

Another young worker spoke with the WSWS about the decision by CNH workers to form a rank-and-file committee, independent of the UAW, to fight for their demands and link up with workers at the Detroit Three factories and elsewhere. “Workers have to stand together and take the fight into their own hands,” he said, adding, “The UAW is not doing it.”

As WSWS campaigners handed out newsletters, another worker shouted, “I hope they get what they

want. We’re going to have get ready to go on strike too.” Referring to Curry’s position on Daimler’s board and his opposition to a strike, the worker said sarcastically, “Ain’t that a coincidence?”

Teresa, a new worker at the plant, spoke about the impact of inflation and the pandemic, which claimed the lives of at least six Warren Truck Assembly workers since March 2020. “Prices are up and there is not enough money. I’m a single mom and one daughter is in college and another in high school. I’m working so hard, 12 hours a day, to keep things together. Sometimes my body just says ‘no more.’

“It’s like in the hospitals, they are not staffing them right and forcing everyone else to do overtime. If you rest you can do a better job. But they are only interested in getting the trucks out here. We’re just a number. If someone collapses or dies from Covid, they’ll get someone to replace you.”

Because the rapid spread of the highly infectious and immune-resistant Omicron BA.2 and BA.2.12.1 subvariants, the auto companies have resumed mask mandates, after abandoning any mitigation efforts. At the same time, the UAW is colluding with management to conceal the number of new cases in the plant and prevent any disruptions to the building of the highly profitable Ram pickup trucks at the Warren plant.

“In the plant, we’ve had more deaths and infections,” Teresa said. “They found out that someone who was infected had worked with all the members of their team. The workers expected they would be checked and quarantined but nothing happened. They don’t care whether you live or die.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact