

“Everyone needs to get together and strike”: Detroit autoworkers speak out against mass layoffs at Warren Truck Assembly Plant

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Autoworkers were furious at a local union meeting Thursday afternoon near Detroit, called to discuss mass layoffs at Stellantis's Warren Truck Assembly Plant. Last week, the company announced nearly 2,500 layoffs to take effect October 8.

“The United Auto Workers lied to us, saying we're all going to have jobs for life,” one worker said before the meeting. “First, they fired the supplemental workers they promised to roll over. Now it's everybody who hired in after June 2018. They want to get rid of the second shift and whole departments.”

The worker continued:

We've got to fight this. There's nothing to be scared of because they'll take away everything if we don't stop them. They may shuffle some workers to Jefferson or Toledo, but there's not enough room for 2,500 workers. We were supposed to get the electric truck, but they sent it to Mexico for cheaper wages. The workers in Mexico are fighting too because they can't feed their families. We all have to come together because we have to feed our families regardless of what country we're in.

United Auto Workers Local 140 called the meeting at 3:00 p.m. during the week, ostensibly to discuss the layoffs, although workers complained that they received no meaningful information from the bureaucrats. The scheduling in the middle of a work week was designed to depress attendance, as it made it difficult for first shift workers to attend. Nevertheless, hundreds of autoworkers attended the meeting.

“They [the UAW Local 140 officials] didn't want anyone to know about the meeting, basically,” one worker said. “They should have held the meeting on a Sunday like they normally

do when everyone could have showed up. I have to be at work on second shift, so I had to leave the meeting early to get to work to be on time.”

Opposition from workers inside the hall forced the union to postpone to 3:30.

Workers placed blame for the cuts squarely on the UAW bureaucracy. Following a limited strike last year which did not seriously impact production, it rammed through a sellout contract, which it falsely claimed was a “historic” victory.

Since then, more than 8,000 autoworkers in the US have lost their jobs. It has since been revealed that the UAW knew these cuts were coming before the contract but said nothing about it. This is part of an offensive in the global auto industry, which is using electric vehicles and other new technologies as a weapon against jobs.

Outside, campaigners for the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network distributed copies of its statement, “Fight the layoffs at Stellantis Warren Truck! Organize a rank-and-file counteroffensive!” They also distributed copies of a statement by Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran against union president Shawn Fain, proposing a three-point program in defense of jobs.

Joseph Kishore, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US president, also spoke to workers as they entered the meeting. Kishore issued a statement following the meeting calling for a rank-and-file movement of all workers in the UAW and beyond to defend the jobs of the Warren Truck workers.

The union, meanwhile, offered workers no plan for how to fight the layoffs, instead handing out material from Stellantis and the government about how to file for unemployment and other technical issues.

One worker said, after the meeting:

They gave us a bunch of hoo-ha, but no real information. People asked a lot of questions in the meeting, but they didn't have a lot of answers. It was just, “We'll get back with you on this, and we'll get

back with you on that.” They did the same thing when we ratified the contract. There was a bunch of this, that and the other. But none of it happened. That is what this was, too.

She said UAW officials claimed that there are “200 openings at [Sterling Heights Assembly Plant], 150 at Toledo. Belvidere [in Illinois] is going to open back up. Just a bunch of things they think people want to hear. But those jobs aren’t even going to happen. SHAP was laying people off just recently.”

She continued:

We still do not have the new contract book. They printed out pages they wanted us to read from online, but it is not the full contract book. It is all just blowing smoke. They just want to give you what you want to hear and what they can get away with saying.

Someone got up and raised the point about a shorter workweek [which UAW President Shawn Fain claimed to be fighting for last year]. We are putting the money in the billionaires’ pockets. But Shawn Fain is doing no fighting, except along with the politicians he is with, like Kamala Harris. That is where his concern is right now.

A Warren Truck worker, who was not present at the meeting, spoke separately to the WSWs about conditions in the plant:

They’ve been switching us from nights to days and having workers on one week and off one week. You try to collect unemployment, but it doesn’t cut it. It’s rough. I always heard about the auto industry closing plants and cutting thousands of jobs, but this is the first time I’ve seen it come to fruition.

Lots of people want something to happen, to stand up and stop this, but the union is going along with it and not fighting. A lot of us are still processing this and trying to figure out what we’re going to do. At the same time, they are ramping up production to get every last drop of production from us. We’re building \$100,000 trucks that nobody can afford to buy. Stellantis has made billions off of us and they’re throwing us into the streets.

The union knew this was going to happen and they are just letting it happen. It would take a lot of people to get on the same page to get US, Mexican and European workers together to fight, but we have to do it.

A former WTAP worker also spoke to the WSWs:

The union and the company lied when they said they were rolling over the supplementals [to full-time status]. Instead, they fired them. Now, the full timers are worried whether or not they will be transferred to other plants. But there are too many being laid off to get transferred.

People put their faith in Fain and the rank-and-file committees warned them not to. But now they have nothing to lose. They have to stand up for their jobs so they can feed their families. They can’t stand there with their tails between their legs. The ones in charge of the union or the presidents and the politicians from both parties can’t be in charge of you. The UAW leaders act like they’re your friends and have your backs, but they’re not standing up for you.

We don’t mean anything to these companies. You get rolled over and you think this is my plant. You adjust your shifts and lifestyle to this plant, and then they take it all away. I knew something was wrong when they said they were rolling the TPTs over—it was all lies.

Another worker told the WSWs outside the meeting:

I think Stellantis is bad news altogether. It’s the UAW too. We are paying them, and they are not sticking up for us. If the union president did so good, where is he now? He is nowhere around. He is long gone; taking his vacations and whatever. He got paid off, that’s my opinion.

They said at the time, “Oh, yeah. We made it so they can’t close the plant.” What do you think is going to happen in four years? The plant is going to be gone. They will be out of Michigan. They are building the new Dodge electric truck in Brazil.

He concluded: “The only way this is going to stop is if everyone in the plant walks out. Everyone needs to get together at one time and strike, because we don’t appreciate what this company is doing. The UAW didn’t do anything for us, they knew this was coming along.”



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