

“We have to fight these job cuts”: Warren Truck autoworkers speak out on eve of mass layoffs

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Autoworkers: Join the fight against mass layoffs! Sign up to be contacted about getting involved in the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network by filling out the form below.

Just days before the October 8 deadline for the layoff of more than 2,400 workers at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant, workers at the suburban Detroit factory are angry over the complicity of the United Auto Workers bureaucracy with Stellantis management and insist there should be a fight to defend their jobs.

A worker losing her job said autoworkers should stand up and fight before the layoffs are implemented next Tuesday. “Everybody come join me in front of the building on Monday morning,” she said.

A revolt by rank-and-file workers has been growing in recent weeks, opening up the possibility for a broad-based struggle of the working class against eroding living standards and escalating attacks on jobs.

The union bureaucracies are desperately seeking to get this rebellion under control. Over 30,000 Boeing machinists have been on strike for three weeks after rejecting an IAM-backed sellout contract by 95 percent. Meanwhile, the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) bureaucracy announced Thursday that it was moving to shut down the powerful strike by 45,000 dockworkers after just three days, amid growing fears in the ruling class that the strike would ignite a wave of struggles by workers leading into the November elections.

“We have to do something to keep these jobs,” said a young Warren Truck worker facing the loss of her job after three years with Stellantis. “Starting all over is a lot. I don’t know what’s going to happen to me. I’m way down the [seniority] line. It’s like we’re up in the air, and we have to wait and see.”

The worker expressed disdain for the UAW’s public relations campaign against Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares and had no illusions that this would do anything to stop next week’s job cuts. “They play a good game,” she said of UAW officials like union President Shawn Fain. As for Fain’s claim that he won a “great contract” last year, she said, “Great for who?”

She agreed that power should be in the hands of the rank-and-file workers instead of the UAW apparatus. “We need to have

some type of power because it’s like at this point, they pretty much tell us come, go, sit, stand, and then they are going to throw you out of job.”

In opposition to the UAW bureaucracy’s promotion of American nationalism, the worker expressed support for the planned strike by Italian Stellantis workers against 12,000 planned job cuts. “We need to unite together to save our jobs,” she said.

A veteran worker nearing retirement said, “We’re losing a lot of good people, and it’s very sad. Their lives are just being stripped from them. I’m praying that they are making room for the five-year people in other plants, the one-year people are not going anywhere.”

She agreed that one-year workers needed to protect their livelihoods too, but the company was not going to make room for all 2,450 workers in other plants. “I’ve got two years left. I’m hoping this plant lasts two years.”

In addition to Warren Truck, Stellantis has fired hundreds of supplemental workers and hundreds of lower seniority full-time workers over recent weeks at the Detroit-area Mack, Jefferson and Sterling Heights plants, along with factories in Toledo, Ohio, and Kokomo, Indiana.

This is part of an escalating wave of jobs cuts in the global auto industry, including plant closures and layoffs by VW in Germany, as the automakers seek to shift the cost of the rocky transition to electric vehicles onto the backs of autoworkers.

The contracts pushed by Fain’s administration following last year’s bogus “stand-up” strikes have paved the way for sweeping job cuts. The cuts were coordinated with the Biden-Harris administration, which sees the EV transition as critical for its escalating trade and military confrontation with China.

In the meantime, Fain has become one of the biggest promoters of Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris, who faces widespread opposition in Michigan because of her steadfast support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza and escalating war against Iran. Fain will be hosting Harris at a campaign event in Flint, Michigan, on Friday and will hold another pro-Harris rally with Bernie Sanders on Saturday.

At the same time, the UAW bureaucracy’s denunciation of

“foreign owners” like Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares only boosts the fascist rhetoric of Trump. Earlier this week, Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance denounced Stellantis for shifting production of the Dodge Ram truck to Mexico.

UAW holds bankrupt “Keep Your Promise” rally while really blocking the fight

On Thursday, the UAW bureaucracy held a march to promote its toothless “Keep Your Promise” campaign against Tavares. The event consisted chiefly of union bureaucrats, supporters of Fain’s Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) and local Democrats, including Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. A UAW notice for the event made clear, “UAW members will not be picketing or striking, this is not a work stoppage. Attendees will not block traffic or driveways. Workers must work their shifts as scheduled.”

In a press conference afterwards, Fain made it clear the UAW had no intention of calling a strike at Stellantis. Asked by a local reporter when there would be a strike, the UAW president said, “We have a lot of grievances going through the process right now. So as those go through the process and there’s timing on all that, and we have meetings we have with the company ... then we exhaust those means, then we have the right to strike.” He said “management here is willing to talk but unfortunately, the CEO across the ocean, he doesn’t seem to care. ... This man is terrible, he shouldn’t have a job.”

Jerry White, US labor editor for the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for vice president, asked Fain at the press conference, “Why aren’t the autoworkers on strike right now, with the dockworkers? Twenty-four hundred Warren Truck workers are getting thrown out of their jobs next week, and you said this was the greatest contract ever.”

Fain responded, “The company chose to do this, the company is laying people off. It goes back to mismanagement. They are choosing to move the overflow Dodge Ram Truck to Mexico instead of putting it at Warren where it belongs. So, we have to do what we have to do.”

The following exchange then took place:

White: “Why aren’t autoworkers on strike right now?”

Fain: “Because we have processes we have to follow.”

White: “They are not following processes. They’re throwing thousands of workers out of their jobs.”

Fain: “So, so, that’s what’s wrong with this country. When companies break the law and they violate the contracts, there are no consequences. When workers fight back, there are always consequences, because companies sue, and unions get screwed every time, that’s what has to change in this country.

That’s what this election is about.”

White: “Wait, Kamala Harris and Biden outlawed the strike of the railroad workers.”

Fain refused to reply and turned his back.

The exchange underscores the need for rank-and-file workers to take the struggle out of the hands of Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy.

On Wednesday, White issued a statement at Warren Truck calling for a united struggle of autoworkers, Boeing workers, dockworkers and other sections of the working class to defend the right to a good-paying job.

It said in part:

It is time for workers at Warren Truck and throughout Stellantis, in fact, the whole auto industry, to draw a line in the sand and stop the massive job cuts. If they can eliminate another shift at Warren Truck, it will be the death knell for this factory right in the center of Motor City. A fight has to be taken up to defend the jobs and livelihoods, particularly of thousands of younger workers who have been hired into the plants since the 2009 restructuring of the auto industry by Obama, which lowered the wages by 50 percent for new hires.

The conditions have been rapidly emerging for such a fight to defend jobs, White said, pointing to the dock and Boeing strikes. But these struggles would not be united from above by the union bureaucracies but only from below by rank-and-file workers.

The union bureaucracies, he continued:

are tied to the corporations and the Biden administration, which want to suppress all forms of opposition in order to wage endless wars in the Middle East against Russia and China. As for Trump, he wants to divide the working class along ethnic lines by inciting violence against immigrants. Rank-and-file workers at Warren Truck and elsewhere must join with the Boeing workers and other workers in building a powerful network of rank-and-file committees to organize strike action to defend the social right of every single worker to a good-paying and secure job.



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