

Mass layoffs hit Stellantis workers at Detroit auto plant: “We have a right to our jobs”

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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.

Monday was the last day of work for more than 2,400 Stellantis workers at the company’s Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit. The factory, which until October 2022 employed 5,500 workers on three shifts, will be reduced to one shift with fewer than 1,300 workers.

The layoffs are part of an international jobs massacre by Stellantis, the world’s fifth-largest auto corporation, which is also targeting 12,000 jobs in Italy. Unions in the country are planning a one-day strike and mass demonstration in Rome on October 18 to protest production cutbacks of at least 30 percent this year.

Stellantis is spearheading the drive by global automakers to force workers to bear the costs of the shift to electric vehicles. “The EV race has become a cost-cutting race,” Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares said earlier this year. Since the 2021 merger of Fiat Chrysler and PSA Group that formed Stellantis, it has carried out \$9 billion in cost reductions.

Far from seriously opposing the job cuts, the United Auto Workers bureaucracy is conducting an impotent “Keep the Promise” public relations campaign, which includes denunciations of “foreign owners” who refuse to “invest in America.” The union claims the company is renegeing on investments promised in the 2023 UAW-Stellantis agreement, but UAW officials agreed to contract language allowing Stellantis to break its commitments if there were “changes in market conditions.”

Asked last week why the UAW has not called a strike to stop the job cuts, UAW President Shawn Fain insisted the union first had to “go through the process” of filing grievances before striking. Otherwise, it could face lawsuits from the company. Meanwhile, Fain is telling workers to place their faith in Kamala Harris, a warmonger and lifetime corporate shill who supported outlawing a strike by 120,000 railroad workers in 2022.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US vice president, condemned the job cuts at Warren Truck in a statement Monday night.

“Today is a dark day for the working class in Detroit,” White said. “Right in the middle of the Motor City, thousands of workers, including many young workers and single mothers, are being stripped of a livelihood for themselves and their children.

“This is the brutal reality of the capitalist system, which Kamala Harris and Donald Trump defend. It is a system based on the

exploitation of the working class that provides untold riches to the capitalist owners and nothing but economic insecurity and poverty for workers.”

White also denounced Fain and the UAW bureaucracy for failing to “lift a finger to defend the jobs and livelihoods of these workers.”

Laid-off autoworkers should organize and join the network of Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees, White said, and link up with those workers still in the plants, including auto parts, logistics, railroad, healthcare and public school workers throughout the metropolitan area.

“Protests and strikes should be organized to demand the reversal of the layoffs, the reinstatement of all fired supplemental workers and laid off full-time workers, and to demand the right to a secure and good-paying job for every worker,” White said.

“We have a right to have our jobs”

UAW Local 140 officials are telling Warren Truck workers that many could be transferred to other plants. But there is no way that thousands of workers can be absorbed in plants that are already reducing production.

Over the last few weeks, hundreds of full-time and supplemental workers at Stellantis’s nearby Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) and the two plants that make up the Detroit Assembly Complex have received robocalls telling them they are out of work.

“On October 24, we’re supposed to find out what is going to happen or not happen,” a Warren Truck worker, who was just laid off, told the WSWS. Local union officials, she said, were telling workers that the status of their transfers would not be resolved until then. “People are upset, confused and don’t know what is going to happen. Shawn Fain seems to be just worrying about himself and the election of Harris and not the people who are being impacted by these layoffs.”

A worker at the Detroit Assembly Complex’s Mack plant added, “Everyone expects a bit of turmoil in the auto industry, but this is stressful. There is so much back and forth with management and the union, and no one seems to be able to tell us anything definitive. For the youngest and lowest seniority members of our

workforce, I'm sure there is a constant fear that they could get the phone call next letting them know that they are losing their jobs.

"After working for a company for anywhere between five years to three decades, it is disgusting that people are just getting a phone call letting them know that they won't have an income soon. For those of us in the middle of the pack seniority-wise, we've had to say goodbye to good workers and good people simply because their seniority wasn't enough to keep them in the plant.

"People have bills to pay, especially those who have taken advantage of the car program that was introduced in the current contract."

A SHAP worker told the WSWS, "The company sent text messages to 56 people that they were laid off and that it was their last day, and we keep looking at our phones expecting the same. I worked at Dana for \$15 an hour, got laid off and started here at \$15. Now I could be out anytime. It is never ending."

Another SHAP worker, commenting on the recent shutdown of the dockworkers' strike by the International Longshoremen's Association, said, "The strikes are getting shut down and the opportunity for people to stand up for their jobs and try to save their jobs. Don't people have freedom of speech, the right to say what they feel and what they think?"

"People need their jobs. We go home, we got kids at home, we got a light bill, we got a mortgage, you are trying to work, and they say, 'We are done.' What do you do after that? We have a right to have our jobs and not come up here, do nothing wrong and get fired. We just get up every day, working people, come to work and get fired. Make that make sense."

The worker also denounced the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza that began a year ago and the escalating threats of war against Iran. "I feel for people in other countries. They have children dying, and we just don't need this war crime.

"That is how I see it, it is a war crime—all this killing and dropping bombs. We need peace in the world, for people to come to work, build their lives like peaceful citizens. We have got all nationalities and races in our country, and we have the same interests wherever we come from."

"Workers need an international strategy"

The Warren Truck layoffs are part of a wider assault on jobs in the US and internationally.

Despite the widely reported drop in the official unemployment rate from 4.2 to 4.1 percent in August, employment in manufacturing, transportation and warehousing were all down as corporations utilize automation to slash thousands of jobs. An estimated 6.8 million workers are officially unemployed, up half a million from last year, and another 4.6 million are working part-time because their hours were cut, or they were unable to find full-time jobs.

The number of workers who voluntarily quit their jobs to find a better one fell to its lowest level in four years in August. This is

the result of the deliberate policy of the US Federal Reserve to tighten credit and use the threat of mass unemployment to beat back the growing demands by workers for wages that keep up with inflation.

The last several months, however, have seen an increase in strikes, which have taken the form of a rebellion against the pro-corporate and pro-war union bureaucracies. These include the three-week strike by 33,000 Boeing workers after they overwhelmingly rejected a union-backed contract. More than 525 Eaton Aerospace workers in Jackson, Michigan, went on strike days later after rejecting two UAW-backed contracts.

These mounting struggles must be united, but this will only happen if workers take control of them. This means expanding the network of rank-and-file committees, which are independent of the union bureaucracies and can empower workers to fight to defend their right to a job.

"Workers need an international strategy," White, the SEP's vice presidential candidate, wrote in his statement. "This means rejecting the nationalism spouted by Fain who claims that American bosses are better than Stellantis' 'foreign owners.' This is a fraud. US-based GM and Ford are no less ruthless than Stellantis and VW, and they see the mass layoffs at Warren Truck as a prelude to their own plant closings and mass layoffs."

The Socialist Equality Party, he said, "insists that the rights of workers for a secure job and living incomes must take precedence over the 'right' of the corporate executives and wealthy shareholders to boost their profits through destroying our jobs and livelihoods.

"The great advances in technology, including EVs and automation, must be used to shorten the workweek and sharply improve living standards, not destroy workers' jobs and impoverish their families.

"The only way the right to a job can be guaranteed is by taking the giant industries out of the hands of the corporate-financial oligarchy and transforming the global auto industry into a public utility, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class."



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