

Biden White House backs UAW bureaucracy's phony "Keep the Promise" campaign

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Are you a Stellantis worker? Fill out the form at the end of this article to get information about joining the Autoworkers Network of Rank-and-File Committees.

Amidst continuing layoffs at Stellantis plants in the US, the United Auto Workers and the Biden administration are seeking to channel workers anger behind the union's phony "Keep the Promise" campaign.

Demonstrating its contempt for workers, Stellantis has notified many of those being laid off through robo-calls. Several assembly plants in the Detroit area are on temporary shutdowns following the layoff of 2,450 workers at the Warren Truck Assembly plant in Detroit on October 8.

On Wednesday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre read a statement calling on Stellantis management to go forward with planned US investments. After again praising the supposedly "historic" 2023 UAW contract, Jean-Pierre claimed the deal "included a commitment to reopen and expand production in communities that were devastated by previous plant closures. What we want to see is Stellantis, certainly, deliver on those commitments to the UAW and to the communities."

She added, "Again, we were very proud to see that very good-faith negotiation that occurred and what was delivered. And so, that's what we want to see at the end of the day."

In fact, the 2023 contract contained no ironclad job protections. The UAW bureaucracy agreed to an escape clause making any investments subject to "market conditions." The contract also sanctioned the mass firing of more than 2,000 temporary workers. After the deal's ratification, production shifts were also eliminated at the Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack, the Toledo Complex and most recently Warren Truck.

In recent weeks Stellantis has upped its threats, floating plans to downsize or even relocate the Auburn Hills, Michigan headquarters of its North American operations. This week, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer met with Stellantis officials to discuss the status of the Auburn Hills headquarters.

Afterwards, the Democratic governor issued an obsequious statement declaring, "We've had ongoing conversations with all of the (automakers), frankly, and a lot of other companies in Michigan just to touch base, make sure that if they foresee anything in the future that we're their first call and that we always want to be good partners."

In fact, the state of Michigan and local governments have funneled billions of dollars into the coffers of the auto companies, which have extorted tax breaks and other subsidies by threatening to move operations to lower cost areas. Those politicians most willing to do the bidding of the auto bosses have been rewarded with generous campaign donations.

Today, Stellantis autoworkers and workers at suppliers are set to hold a one-day strike and national protest in Rome to oppose job cuts. Production in Stellantis' Italian plants is down 25 percent for the year.

Earlier in the week, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares warned that corporate tax increases proposed by the French legislature would lead to reduced investment.

In comments at the Paris auto show, Tavares said he was "not ruling out" further job cuts as part of a global cost cutting drive aimed at pushing the cost of the transition to electric vehicle production onto the shoulders of workers.

Referring to Chinese EV manufacturers in a separate interview with the French business daily *Les Echos*, he said, "I do not see how we can compete with competitors

who are, technologically speaking, as good or even better than us, and 30 percent cheaper, if I cannot lower costs.”

The accelerating job cuts pose the need for rank-and-file workers to wage a real, not a phony fight to defend their jobs and livelihoods. This requires building up the network of rank-and-file committees in the factories to prepare strike action to defend the right to a job for every worker. At the same time, these committees, working under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), should establish lines of communication with workers in Italy, Canada, Mexico and other countries to coordinate common actions across national borders.

A worker at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly, where hundreds of workers have been laid off in recent weeks, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I have 15 years and I’m still worried. They are laying off every week and no one is safe. They are even trying to push out high seniority workers.

“We have never seen anything like this, no matter how many mergers we went through. I am really worried and scared for my family. They have been firing supervisors. It seems like every day we are losing 4-5 people.”

In a “Labor Voices” op-ed column posted in the October 17 *Detroit News* titled, “It’s time to stand up against Stellantis,” UAW President Shawn Fain attempted to leverage the walkout by workers in Italy to cover-up the UAW’s own capitulation to Stellantis by announcing that a UAW delegation would go to Italy, in a phony gesture of cross-border solidarity.

The UAW is incapable, and in fact hostile, to any genuine fight to unite workers internationally. Since the announcement of the Stellantis layoffs, Fain has ranted against the foreign-born CEO of Stellantis, comparing him to the supposedly worker-friendly American bosses at Ford and GM. In addition to its regular attacks on Mexican and Chinese workers for supposedly “stealing” American jobs, the UAW recently issued a broadside against Canadian workers. This was in regards to talk of Stellantis moving production of the Dodge Durango to Windsor, Ontario, across the river from Detroit.

Fain’s talk of a “real fight” amounts to nothing but pathetic bluster. “We will once again fight like hell to save Stellantis from mismanagement, corporate greed and the killing of thousands of good jobs. Our members are determined to stick together and are ready to stand up,” he declared. He went on to claim UAW members were “ready to walk out on strike if that’s what it takes.”

In reality, the campaign largely consists of filing

grievances against Stellantis and holding strike authorization votes at a few locals. The UAW has set no strike deadline or issued any concrete demands. The entirely fraudulent character of the “Keep the Promise” campaign was shown by the failure of Fain to even acknowledge, let alone protest, the recent mass layoffs at Warren Truck.

Commenting on Fain’s rhetoric, the SHAP worker said, “It was all just publicity. We need to put our foot down and let us all strike. They need us to run the plant. It has been BS all across the board. I am all for my union brothers and sisters who all want to stick together for the right thing.

“What they are doing to the people in Italy is so sad. What are they supposed to do now? When you put all your faith in a company, build a career, and then you get this. It would be better if we all stand together, definitely.”

Behind Fain’s talk of strike is the fear of a movement of the rank and file erupting outside the control of the union apparatus. Seeking to bolster Fain, who has earned the deep enmity of workers, the Biden administration has come to the defense of the embattled UAW apparatus. The UAW is playing a key role in the Kamala Harris presidential campaign in the battleground state of Michigan, with Fain regularly appearing with Harris and other Democrats in the state.

The completely insincere pledges by Fain to “fight” are exposed by the fact that so far the UAW has only held strike authorization votes at two small UAW locals representing Stellantis parts distribution workers in California and Colorado. In response, Stellantis has filed a series of lawsuits against the UAW, threatening to impose monetary damages if workers walk out.

What is clear is that no action will be taken by the UAW apparatus. The situation again underscores the importance of a movement from below, through building and expanding the Autoworkers Network of Rank-and-File Committees and the IWA-RFC.

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