

Fiat Chrysler workers hit with temporary layoffs across North America

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Six thousand workers at Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) plants in Windsor, Canada and 5,000 workers at the company's assembly plant in Belvidere, Illinois have been temporarily laid off since October 22. Autoworkers were given no advance notice by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union or its counterpart in Canada, Unifor, about the pending layoffs and production stoppages.

Over 3,000 workers at FCA transmission plants in Kokomo and Tipton, Indiana who have also been on temporary layoff since October 15 will now be out of work at least an additional two weeks. After keeping workers in the dark, UAW Local 685 officials are holding informational meetings today to "dispel layoff rumors, discuss the actual layoff process and answer questions," according to a leaflet that workers sent to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. The local has spent the last three months ignoring a unanimous strike mandate by transmission workers over more than 200 unresolved grievances, the majority over health and safety.

Statements from FCA US, FCA Canada, and Unifor Local 444 President David Cassidy, all say that the layoffs are needed to "adjust inventories." In comments that could have been delivered by any corporate manager, Cassidy told the *Windsor Star*, "Inventory adjustment is nothing new in our industry...we often see this in the fall and at Christmas or just after. Sales can be up and down at those times of year."

It is also, "nothing new" for autoworkers to be strung along, lied to and sold out by well-paid union bureaucrats who oppose any collective action to defend the jobs and livelihoods of the workers they falsely claim to represent. Autoworkers at BVA were originally told by management they would be laid off for a week, with the expectation of returning to work on

October 29. However, an automated message was delivered on October 25, informing workers they would be out of work for an additional two weeks.

Workers in Tipton and Kokomo were encouraged by an FCA spokeswoman, speaking to the *Kokomo Tribune*, to apply for "Indiana State Unemployment Insurance and FCA US-paid Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB)." The spokeswoman also informed workers that continuation of their "medical/dental/vision coverage, will be based on eligibility."

Autoworkers spoke to *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* about this outrageous situation. Felicity, a Belvidere assembly worker who used a pseudonym to avoid retaliation by the company and the union, said, "It has gotten less safe" in the plant since she began working there three years ago. Explaining a recent workplace injury, Felicity detailed a culture of indifference to workers' safety exhibited by management and the UAW.

"Supervisors don't understand that if the workers are telling you something is wrong, then it needs to get fixed. You just don't leave it until someone gets hurt. But that is the culture they, they don't want to fix anything until someone gets hurt. Once someone gets hurt, then it gets brought back on us."

When asked by this reporter if the union has been any help, she responded, "No, you're on your own. What is the union doing? They are not doing anything. They take our dues, that's it. They take our money, build luxury cottages, and fund these luxury trips with our dues money," she said, referring to the lavish lodgings being built for former UAW president Dennis Williams at the UAW's Black Lake, Michigan resort. "I am barely paying my mortgage, yet you're getting a cottage built? Workers are dying, yet you're getting a

cottage.”

Referring to the multi-tier wage and benefit system introduced by the UAW in the “transformational” contracts with the Detroit-based automakers in 2007, Felicity agreed that all tiers should be abolished. “Why, if we are doing the same job, I’m getting hurt, just like you are getting hurt, why should we be paid differently. It breeds hostility between the workers.”

Felicity continued, “When I see things that are wrong, I have to say something. Maybe if other workers see what is going, we can start to make some changes. If it weren’t for us workers, not a Dodge Ram, not a Jeep, not a thing would be built.”



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