

As COVID cover-up continues

Wage theft exposed at Fiat Chrysler/Stellantis Detroit Assembly Complex

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Autoworkers have experienced wage theft and dangerous working conditions at Stellantis' new Detroit Assembly Complex - Mack, according to sources who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. Stellantis is the new global auto company formed by the merger earlier this month between Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) and Peugeot (PSA).

The plant, which opened late last year on the grounds of the former Chrysler Mack Avenue Engine Complex, is the city of Detroit's first new assembly plant in three decades. This plant and adjacent Jefferson North Assembly Plant will produce the new Jeep Grand Cherokee luxury SUV, which debuts this spring.

Hundreds of millions of dollars out of the \$2.5 billion price tag for the new facility were covered by incentives from the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan. The city paid \$50 million for the 215-acre site, \$43.5 million of which went to buy a 117-acre parcel from the family of infamous billionaire Manuel Moroun, who owns the Ambassador Bridge, which connects downtown Detroit to Canada. The remaining 132 acres were bought for \$4.6 million. The city spent an additional \$60 million for environmental cleanup of the former brownfield site.

In May 2019, the Michigan Strategic Fund board approved \$223 million in tax incentives for the plant, with a further \$92.9 million approved in July 2019 by the Michigan Economic Development Corp.

To sell the project to the city of Detroit, FCA/Stellantis pledged 4,100 new jobs that would go to Detroit residents. In reality, 3,800 of those jobs are going to low-paid supplemental employees already working for the company at other locations, who are

being advanced to full time positions at the Mack plant. This has left many impoverished Detroit workers without the jobs they were promised. Stellantis currently employs the highest percentage of temporary and "supplemental" workers out of the Big Three, about 59 percent of its US workforce.

Moreover, several Mack workers have told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* that they have been underpaid since relocating to the new Detroit plant. The wage progression in their contract specified a raise to \$23.69 per hour when they hit 3 years. When the time came, they did not get their raise, and they are making \$3.60 per hour less than what was promised.

After not hearing from the UAW for two months, a group of employees went to the UAW office to complain. They were met with "outlandish lies and excuses" as to why the low rate was correct, the workers say.

The UAW eventually admitted its "mistake," saying it would take weeks to fix the workers' pay rate and issue back pay, even though their contract specifies that pay issues have to be resolved within 24 hours. This created intense hardship for many workers, who had been counting on the pay raise to meet their bills.

"The UAW makes millions and millions in profits for little to no service. And FCA had a record-breaking year in profits while many of us are not even working due to COVID, but they want to try and swindle people out of less than \$4 an hour. Not only do they prove time and time again that they do not work for us, they can't even do simple things such as reply in timely fashion, if at all."

He added, "They can't answer a single damn question, which really irks me. When I was a temp

worker, they couldn't answer questions because the temporary full time extortion was new to them. Now I'm full time and a year within our new contract and they still don't know answers because it's a 'new' contract."

Workers also reported dangerous working conditions at the Mack plant as the coronavirus rages through the population. Token safety measures by the auto companies, implemented after a wildcat strike wave in the spring forced a two-month shutdown of the industry, have been largely abandoned.

One worker reported, "At first there was only one turnstile and there were thousands of us packed in like sardines. It is still inhumane, a complete risk."

Another worker said, "As you know, the UAW and [Stellantis] management try with all their power to not inform workers about who is out with COVID or who came in contact. You literally have to be close friends with someone and have them personally tell you. This is how bad it is."

This coverup of infections and even deaths is the norm throughout the industry. No public figures on the extent of the virus in the auto industry have been made public, but the WSWs has uncovered major outbreaks, through discussions with autoworkers, at plants around the country, including Toledo Jeep, Kokomo Transmission, Belvidere Assembly, Sterling Heights Assembly, Sterling Stamping, Warren Truck, Ford Kansas City, Faurecia Gladstone and others.

However, a leaked management report from Stellantis' Jefferson North Assembly Plant, which was also shared with but not released by UAW local officials, demonstrates that both management and the union are carefully tracking the spread of the virus inside the plants in secret. The UAW, which long abandoned even basic representative functions, today acts as the bribed agent of the auto companies, demonstrated most graphically by the recently-closed corruption probe by federal investigators which brought down two former union presidents.

Autoworkers throughout the country, with the assistance of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, are taking matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file safety committees in opposition to both the UAW's treachery and the "herd immunity" policies of both the Republicans and the Democrats. These committees demand the closure of all

nonessential production, with full guaranteed compensation and public health measures to be paid for out of the billions in profits made by the auto companies and superrich during the pandemic, complete transparency on the spread of coronavirus in the plants, and workers' control over safety conditions.

To join a rank-and-file safety committee, or for help establishing a committee at your own plant, contact the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org.



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