

Stellantis announces mass layoffs at Belvidere Assembly plant

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Stellantis announced last week it would lay off over 400 workers at its Belvidere Assembly Plant starting in January 2022 due to the microchip shortage. So far, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1268 at the Belvidere plant has not published any statement on its website or its social media accounts about the layoff.

The company announcement stated, “As we continue to balance global sales with the production of the Jeep Cherokee produced at the Belvidere (Ill.) Assembly Plant, which has been further exacerbated by the unprecedented global microchip shortage, Stellantis has determined that additional staffing actions are needed as a result of changes in the plant’s operations.

“The company sent WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification) notices today to affected hourly employees, the state of Illinois, the city of Belvidere and the UAW informing them of a workforce reduction that will take effect as early as Jan. 14, 2022. The Company will make every effort to place laid off hourly employees in open full-time positions as they become available based on seniority.”

In the spring of this year, the UAW signed off on previous rounds of layoffs at Belvidere Assembly, effectively bringing the plant down to a single shift of just over 1,600 workers. The plant went through a series of shutdowns and temporary layoffs that severely impacted workers, who struggled to pay for basic necessities such as food and housing, while a number of workers reported that they did not get unemployment benefits.

The widespread supply chain disruptions, including the semiconductor chip shortage in Taiwan and other countries, began during the COVID-19 pandemic and have worsened as leaders around the world have rejected any form of systematic scientific policy of eliminating the virus globally—largely in order to keep

the profits of the global multinational corporations soaring. This despite an official toll of over 5 million deaths and up to 15 million dead counting excess deaths, according to the *Economist*.

Auto companies like Stellantis have kept workers laboring in dangerous sweatshop conditions while the company and the union are concealing the spread of the deadly virus in the plants. Stellantis also refuses to pay workers who need to quarantine when they report symptoms.

Ray (whose name has been changed to protect his identity) is a Stellantis worker at a parts depot in Naperville, Illinois who spoke about the layoffs of his coworkers at Belvidere. He denounced the company and the union, telling the WSW, “It’s not good. I thought they shipped a lot of people off to different plants, like Ohio and Detroit.

“I’m a two-tier worker. I started in 2015, but it’s like they’re pushing all the first-tier workers out of there. Or basically like cutting back on a lot of stuff.”

Ray also spoke out about the rotten role of the UAW in the contract negotiations for the Big Three auto companies even as the UAW tried to ram through company-backed contracts at Volvo, Dana and now John Deere. “It’s terrible. It’s like [the UAW] are just trying to fatten their pockets even more with the previous contract. They threw money in front of people to get people to sign the contract. In the long run, because you have more two-tier workers than traditional workers, eventually it’s going to backfire.”

The widely hated tier system has manufactured divisions among workers, Ray added. “They want you to speed up older workers. Like, man, speed up? Younger workers are saying, man, these older workers are not doing nothing? I don’t like it. It’s divisive, and like I try to tell people, if the bigger heads that sold the

union workers out, how do you keep on going off the same contract? You can't trust none of it. I don't understand it. You got McDonald's workers making \$15, \$16 an hour, but they expect you to buy a car that's forty, fifty thousand dollars. You can't afford it. I know at the parts depot you have to wait eight years to max out at \$25 an hour."

The pandemic and the policies of governments and corporations like Stellantis have inflicted losses on thousands of workers like Ray. "There's no more essential pay. Personally, I had COVID, and my mom passed from it. I got the vaccine."

"But the government has done something [terrible]," Ray noted, laying the blame at their feet, "and I'm just trying to stay out of the way of the mess. It's terrible."

While the management with the collusion of the UAW has forced workers into unsafe factories, the UAW's ongoing corruption scandal has laid bare rampant criminality. In the latest indictment, a UAW local official was accused of stealing \$2 million in member dues money, again highlighting the fact that the corruption is not a matter of "a few bad apples" but pervades the union at all levels.

Ray Curry, the current president of the UAW, was recently investigated by federal agents for improperly accepting over \$2,000 for a college football playoff championship event from a vendor. Two previous presidents of the UAW, Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, are also serving jail time for corruption and embezzlement of union funds.

The corrupt corporatist UAW cannot be reformed. There is widespread anger brewing. The UAW has overseen four decades of concession contracts that have allowed the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and eviscerated wages, benefits and working conditions.

Workers at Stellantis Belvidere Assembly should not be forced to pay for the failures of management. Workers must be guaranteed full pay and benefits during any layoffs or shutdowns. To defend jobs and working conditions workers at Belvidere must form their own rank-and-file organizations. Belvidere workers can learn from and link up with the courageous independent initiative of John Deere rank-and-file workers, Dana workers and Volvo workers, and begin to organize a campaign to protect their jobs, living standards and safety.

If you are a Stellantis Belvidere worker, contact the WSWs today to learn how you can start a rank-and-file committee at your plant to protect your jobs and link up with the striking John Deere and Dana workers in their contract battles.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact