

# UAW, Detroit Democrats facilitate brutal exploitation of temp workers as pandemic decimates Stellantis workforce

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The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted production at Stellantis as well as at other auto and auto parts manufacturing facilities. The social character of the production process, where workers must continuously work in close proximity on assembly lines, contributes to outbreaks. Large numbers of absences due to illness cripples the ability of the companies to manage the shop floors.

At the Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit, it is estimated that at any given time, there are 500 employees off work, quarantining or simply staying away to avoid getting themselves and their families infected. That is slightly over 10 percent of the labor force. This is likely a significant underestimation of the human impact, since real figures on the prevalence of COVID in the factory are being covered up both management and the United Auto Workers.

However, Stellantis management has implemented a strategy to address this shortage. More than 5,500 low-paid contingent workers have been added to Stellantis' Detroit-area workforce since July 2019, facing conditions of superexploitation amid a deadly pandemic that shows no signs of abating, despite the loud claims of the media and Biden administration.

Many of these workers have been recruited from the city of Detroit, which has offered up workers from the city as cheap, exploitable labor for the auto companies.

Once dubbed the "Paris of the Midwest," Detroit has been transformed by decades of plant closures and social spending cuts into the poorest big city in America. The Detroit bankruptcy in 2013-2014 robbed city workers' pensions and imposed further massive cuts on spending on public services, including transportation, water and the arts. Thousands of city

workers lost their jobs as a result of privatizations.

The administration of Detroit Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan has marketed the city to auto and auto parts makers as a low-cost haven. At every annual address on the Detroit "State of the City" for the last several years, Mayor Mike Duggan boasts of the deals he has made with businesses to bring them back into the city. The cheap labor potential resulting from blight-stricken conditions within the city limits, as well as significant tax abatements, have made it lucrative for companies such as Flex-N-Gate, to set up operations in Detroit. Stellantis has carried out a major expansion, opening the Mack Avenue assembly plant on the east side of Detroit last year.

Beginning in 2016, Detroit began its "Community Benefits Ordinance" (CBO), ostensibly to prioritize the interests of Detroit neighborhoods over corporate developers. One of the touted "successes" of the Detroit CBO reported last fall was the hiring of 5,576 Detroit residents to Stellantis manufacturing facilities in the area.

Supplemental workers are hired into Stellantis as well as other companies through local jobs fairs. "But they don't tell people that they might only be working part-time," a Stellantis supplemental worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. They are also required to cover shifts in other plants with little or no notice. Many of the Detroit residents seeking work are attracted to jobs that are advertised within the city for transportation reasons, but they then are compelled to travel to plants, such as Warren Truck, miles away outside the city limits of Detroit.

As described in a letter from a "supplemental employee" posted by the WSWS last month, these

workers are required to work whatever hours are demanded by management. In the letter, the worker explained, “On January 4, 2022, at 5:01PM I was notified via email that I am being required to work a Mandatory six-day, 12-hour shift effective Wednesday, January 5, 2022.”

“Management Supplemental Employees,” in the 2019 contract between Stellantis and the UAW, are designated as a special class of workers who can be scheduled to work whatever hours management deems, without the contractual limitations that apply to seniority workers. Though they work side by side, the company, with the active support of the UAW, has implemented a caste-like division within the workforce.

The exact timeline in which “supplementals” can become “rolled over” to regular workers with their rights and benefits is murky or nonexistent. Supplementals who have asked their UAW representatives about this have been answered along the lines of, “Don’t hold your breath.”

Even the percentage of supplementals working in the plant is kept hidden. One worker told the WSWS, “They don’t tell us, but my guess is that close to 50 percent of the workers on the floor are supplementals ... I know of some supplementals who have been working for five or six years.” The level of disgust and outright anger among workers is high. The worker added, “This is nothing new. Working here is a revolving door.”

The letter exposing the conditions facing supplemental workers at Warren Truck published by the WSWS was read widely in the plant. Another worker said there was a lot of talk and “all kinds of investigations” over who wrote it. They said it wasn’t just the UAW but regular employees, close to the union bureaucracy, who told supplemental employees that “they’re lucky to have a job and to quit whining.”

They added, “If you get found out, you can bet your bottom dollar that you’ll be fired. It’s all over the shop floor: ‘who did this?’”

They continued, “It’s brutal! Like a meat grinder. You go in and you don’t know how you’re going to come out. They move you around all over the place, working two jobs, and putting workers in a position where it is impossible to social distance.”

A worker was out with COVID for 10 days last month, got a negative test, but before being cleared to go back to work they had to stand in line and wait to go

through a long procedure so they could start their shift next day. “It’s harder to get back in than it is to get out. Your negative test has to be verified with an official hospital or urgent care clearance on paper. They don’t even care about the pandemic. When I was out, I had to pay a total of \$150 to get back to work, including \$75 for a certified PCR test,” the worker said.

“Everybody has [COVID],” said a supplemental worker. “We’re losing people. The more they bring in, the more we lose. They know they’re going to lose half of the new ones they bring in.”

The pandemic has exacerbated the pressure on workers that has been mounting after decades of concessions and the imposition of layers of tiered workers with the vital support of the United Auto Workers.

There is intense opposition to these sweatshop type conditions. However, this finds no expression in the UAW. The WSWS calls on workers to join and build rank-and-file committees in every auto plant to oppose the ripping up of workplace conditions and brutal subordination of the health and safety of workers during the pandemic to the drive for profits.

These committees should demand that all supplemental workers be made full time. This must be connected to the demand for the closure of all nonessential workplaces with full pay until the pandemic is contained.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**