

On eve of contract battle, Stellantis CEO escalates threat against Warren Truck workers

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With 170,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers in the US and Canada facing a major contract battle in September, the automakers are stepping up their campaign of corporate terrorism to beat back workers' demands for substantial gains in wages and working conditions.

Last week, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares toured the Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit, where 5,000 workers manufacture highly profitable Wagoneer SUVs and the Ram 1500 Classic truck. Shortly afterwards, he met with officials from United Auto Workers Local 140.

According to a memo from union officials, Tavares complained that Warren Truck had higher rates of absenteeism, production costs and quality problems than other plants in Europe and North America. The memo stated that Tavares asked why people don't come to work and did not like the employee survey results, which showed that "people aren't happy at work."

Tavares reportedly complained that the company had to buy back 300 vehicles from customers since the launch of the new model at the plant. "He stated that any other plant across the world would have shut down facing this issue alone" and that "he should've shut this plant down 1 ½ years ago."

Tavares demanded that the factory reduce its costs by half over the next six months and asked the UAW for "input" on absenteeism and a cost-cutting plan, which would be rolled out by management, "perhaps as early as this week," the post says.

Local 140 officials confirmed that the memo was accurate when contacted by this reporter.

This is the second time in less than six months that Stellantis management has threatened the jobs and livelihoods of workers at the plant. Far from opposing this economic blackmail, the UAW officials have joined in the threats.

Last October, Stellantis Chief Operations Officer Arnaud Deboeuf visited the plant and threatened to shift production elsewhere if quality and absenteeism did not improve. UAW Local 140 President Eric Graham echoed management's threats and denounced workers for the "unacceptable level of defects" at the plant and for taking time off. Shortly afterwards, the company eliminated the third shift at the plant without the slightest opposition from the UAW.

UAW Local 140 officials have endorsed management's threats once again, writing on Tavares' latest visit, "We are sending the

wrong message in terms of absenteeism" and "not progressing fast enough in terms of quality improvements."

According to the *Detroit News*, company executives are not just threatening Warren Truck workers. "Stellantis NV says it's conducting a manufacturing assessment of its Ram 1500 pickup truck plant in Sterling Heights, and it could have implications for jobs and workers' roles," the newspaper reported. The nearby Sterling Heights Assembly Plant employs 6,500 workers.

The threats follow the "indefinite idling" of the Belvidere Assembly Plant in late February and the layoff of the last of 1,300 workers. The company has also slashed jobs at its engine and stamping plants in Michigan.

Tavares has threatened to close more plants due to increased costs for the conversion towards electric vehicles. GM and Ford are also carrying out a global cost-cutting drive, closing plants and slashing the jobs of thousands of salaried employees.

The cuts are having a devastating impact on workers, their families and the broader community. For the auto executives, however, they are a deliberate shot across the bow against workers. As a recent editorial in *Automotive News* warned, "Workers are upset, and the companies have been putting up record profits powered by COVID-era vehicle scarcity. Most members probably expect a big payback."

Pointing to GM's plans to slash salaried workers' jobs, the editorial continued, "If GM is aiming to soften up resistance among UAW leaders and members, the timing is just about perfect: Those who take the buyout offer will be gone by June, meaning that up to \$1.8 billion in costs for the white-collar exits will hit the second-quarter earnings results, which should be announced right around the time of the handshake ceremonies that formally kick off the quadrennial negotiations."

Stellantis workers denounce job threats

In response to these latest threats, one Warren Truck worker wrote, "Well maybe Mr. Tavares needs to recognize that we are not [the] property of the company. We are not here because it makes us happy. We are here selling our time and health to this

company for a wage. Maybe some people feel like their time and health is worth more than what the company wants to pay them.

“Pay us what we’re worth and quit expecting us to be happy when we’re only getting one Saturday off a month. Then you might see a change. Don’t start this BS about cost and competitiveness as an excuse to try to get us to take more concessions or not pay us what we’re worth. The company had plenty of years of concessions to take that extra money the workers gave them and invest it in areas of improvement so don’t punish us for management failures.”

A temporary part-time (TPT) worker at Warren Truck added, “We’re supposed to put in our time and get rolled over to full-time and benefits. It’s like that everywhere but at these auto factories. I mean seriously, would you be ok being a TPT and coming to work knowing the guy next you is getting benefits and profit sharing that you’re not?”

Pointing to the massive and continuing job losses, a veteran worker said, “Since 2007, we’ve lost how many jobs across all of the Big 3? And now at 48,000 members? With line rates increasing, mandatory 6-day work schedules, how many concessions? How many relocations of our members? How many plant closures? How many members are relocated away from their families? How many divorces? How many suicides? On and on.”

A Warren Truck worker with two years told the WSWS, “They are not focusing on why there are quality problems and why people don’t want to go to work. It starts at the top. They’re literally training us not to do things right but just to get the cars out. They’re pushing the team leaders, and they’re pushing us.

“I had to screw a bolt on a Ram truck and some of the airbag was getting in the way. They told me to go ahead anyway. They’re having us do crooked stuff just to keep the line moving.

“Who wants to come to work with so much stress and anxiety that you’re going to get written up. They’re constantly switching shifts and bumping you off jobs. We want a life. We have kids and families.

“The UAW doesn’t do anything for us. They walk around the plant and when you need them, they’re hiding and don’t answer phone calls. Why are we even paying union dues?

“Now they’re taking away personal days and saying that going to the doctors or getting a mammogram is not an excused absence anymore. It’s like they want us to die on the line. A guy had a heart attack, and they just moved him to the side to keep the line going. We’re humans, not robots.”

A third generation autoworker from the Stellantis plant told the WSWS, “I’m not buying that absenteeism is the cause of the problem. The big part of this is them wanting to take the truck to Mexico. They wouldn’t take any advice from anyone on the shop floor about the quality issues.

“They’re forcing us to use junk parts. They make us keep running, when we see problems on the line. They won’t let us shut down. We’re always told that quality is number one, yet 90 percent of the vehicles go in the repair lot. I know for a fact that at the Mack Avenue plant they have 2,000 to 3,000 cars in repair.

“I had a higher level manager tell me that it’s so bad they’re not planning to bring another vehicle inside this plant. It’s a real issue.

“You get treated terribly in there. If the economy wasn’t so terrible, I really think they would lose 50 percent of the workforce. These managers talk to people like they’re dogs! I hear them calling for more manpower on the line and they say ‘Can we get some more bodies over here?’ They don’t have enough respect for someone to even call them a human being.

“At what point is it too much money? Eighteen billion in profits last year. It will never be enough for them! They want more and more. Everything is 100 percent corrupt the way they run things.”

Workers must organize a fight against this corporate terrorism by expanding the network of rank-and-file committees, which are fighting under the banner of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president in the first round of the elections, replied to the threats, “Tavares performs no labor and generates no profit for a living. His pay comes off the backs of all the workers he criticizes the performance of, while he lives a life of luxury, never working a day in it, and still somehow has the gall to criticize workers’ attendance.

“He’s made threats before, and the UAW apparatus has done nothing to fight back. He’s now seeking assistance from the union bureaucrats to find ‘solutions’ to absenteeism. Within the last week Stellantis congratulated Shawn Fain on winning the presidency of the UAW and was quoted in Reuters saying it looked forward to working ‘on issues that will further contribute to our mutual success while securing Stellantis’ position in this highly competitive market.’ He knows the UAW apparatus will mount no challenge to him.

“We must organize together on the shop floors of all plants internationally in rank-and-file committees to ready a fight against parasites like Tavares. We will not win waiting on the UAW apparatus to fight for us.”



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